

## **COURSE GUIDE**

### **ENG 817 AFRICAN-AMERICAN & CARIBBEAN LITERATURE**

**Course Team** Dr. Oluchi Chris OKEUGO (Course Developer/  
Writer ) Department of English and Literary  
Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka  
Enugu State

Course Editor

Course Coordinator



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National Open University of Nigeria  
Headquarters  
University Village  
Plot 91, Cadastral Zone  
NnamdiAzikiwe Expressway  
Jabi, Abuja

Lagos Office  
14/16 Ahmadu Bello Way  
Victoria Island, Lagos

e-mail: [centralinfo@nou.edu.ng](mailto:centralinfo@nou.edu.ng)  
URL: [www.nou.edu.ng](http://www.nou.edu.ng)

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**CONTENTS**

**PAGE**

Introduction	
What You Will Learn in this Course	
Course Aims	
Course Objectives	
Working through the Course	
Course Materials	
Study Units	
Textbooks and References	
Assignment File	
Presentation Schedule	
Assessment	
Tutor-Marked Assignment	
Final Examination and Grading	
Course Marking Scheme	
Course Overview	
How to Get the Most from the Course	
Facilitators /Tutors and Tutorials	
Summary	

## INTRODUCTION

This course will present a comprehensive survey of the literature produced by major writers of the black diaspora in North America (USA & Canada) and the English speaking Caribbean. The course will equally focus on the literary response to the history, socio-economic and political movements during the last three hundred years and in more recent trends in Africa-America and Caribbean Literature.

The course consists of 35 units, historical background to Caribbean literature, historical background to African- American literature, Caribbean Experience and return migration of the West Indians, Postcoloniality and comparative black literature, postcolonial Feminist Identity and the metaphors of self in African- American and Caribbean literature, the battle against Imperialism, canonization and sexism and ambivalent identity and self-identity in selected Caribbean works.

The knowledge of the works of major African-American and Caribbean writers in their social, political and intellectual context, may be a pre-requisite for this course. This course guide tells you briefly what the course is all about, what you are expected to know in each unit; what course materials you will be using and how you can work your way through the material. It also emphasizes the need for tutor-marked assignments. Detailed information on tutor-marked assignment is contained in a file to be sent to you in due course. There are periodic tutorial classes that are linked to the course.

## WHAT YOU WILL LEARN IN THIS COURSE

The overall aim of ENG 817: African-America & Caribbean is to familiarize the students with the complete process of acquainting and understanding the trajectories in African-American & Caribbean literature.

## COURSE AIMS

The course is to equip the students with the knowledge of the voracious and multi-dimensional nature of Black Literature, especially the basic skills involved in realizing a wide range of literary genre in diversified reading. This aim will be achieved by:

- Describing the central aspects of Caribbean history (slavery, colonialism, migration) and discuss their significance,
- Describing the key concepts, themes, tropes, styles, and concerns of Caribbean literary discourse,
- Providing an overview of the history of anglophone Caribbean Literature,
- Discussing the scholarly reception of each literary text,

- Enhancing research skills and skills in finding and assessing teaching materials,
- Explaining the main contributions of Caribbean literature to British and US literary traditions as well as international cultural movements such as modernism,
- Producing the teaching materials for teaching Caribbean literature (or history) at the college-level, including a syllabus, teaching guides, assignments, and lesson plans,
- Producing a shared repository of teaching materials,
- Locating and assess online teaching resources for Caribbean literature,
- Assessing strategies for digital tools for teaching Caribbean literature.

## **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

To achieve the aims set out above, there are overall objectives. In addition, each unit has specific objectives. The unit objectives are always included at the beginning of the unit. You should read them before going through the units. You should always look at the unit objectives on completing the unit to assure yourself that you have done what the unit required and acquired the competencies it aimed to inculcate.

Stated below are the wider objectives of this course. By meeting these objectives, you should have achieved the entire aims of this course.

On successful completion of this course, you should be able to:

- Define and utilize the concepts of diaspora and race, while demonstrating an understanding of the vast application and complexity of these concepts.
- Produce critical readings of texts from writers of the Caribbean that demonstrate an understanding of the essential literary processes of meaning making through character, setting, language, imagery, structure and/or form.
- Analyze how race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, migration, labor, and political economy are related to the historical development of various African diasporic societies and hence the literature of the African diaspora.
- Analyze the relationships between specific historical events and contemporary writings.
- Exhibit an understanding of the relationship between literary production and social, political and economic issues, including, political and revolutionary movements in the Caribbean and African diaspora.

- Understand the geography of the Caribbean and map connections between regional and diasporic social and literary movements and processes.
- Identify and apply the fundamental concepts and methods of African and African American Studies.
- Identify and discuss important literary figures and texts from the Caribbean and its diaspora.
- Understand, identify, and analyze different definitions of Caribbean identity and culture.
- Understand Caribbean history, culture, and identities and how they are represented in literary canons using academic texts, cultural texts, and other sources.
- Distinguish the strengths, weaknesses, and point of view in sources and texts of the course.
- Identify the main argument and focus of an author
- Analyze, compare, contrast, themes and arguments across readings in different historical contexts and genres.
- Develop writing skills by blogging and writing papers.
- Develop critical thinking and close reading skills.

## WORKING THROUGH THIS COURSE

To complete this course, you are required to read the study units, read recommended books and other related materials you can lay your hands on. Each unit contains self-assessment exercises, which you are expected to use in assessing your understanding of the course. At the end of this course is a final examination.

## COURSE MATERIALS

Major component of this course are:

1. Course Guide
2. Study Units
3. Textbooks
4. Assignment File
5. Presentation Schedule

## STUDY UNITS

There are thirty-five units in this course. They are as follows:

### **Module 1: Historical Background to Caribbean Literature**

Unit 1 Slavery in the Caribbean

Unit 2 Abolition

Unit 3 The Post- Emancipation Caribbean

- Unit 4 Implication on Criticism
- Unit 5 Major Writers from the Caribbean

## **Module 2: Historical Background to African- American and Caribbean Literature**

- Unit 1 Fugitive and Ex-Slave Narratives
- Unit 2 Harlem Renaissance or the New Negro-Movement
- Unit 3 The Civil Rights Era and the Black Arts Movement (Black Aesthetics 1960s-1970s)
- Unit 4 The Post Modern Turn in African- American Literature and Neo-Slavery Narratives
- Unit 5 Contemporary Writers: The Literary Movements in African-American Background

## **Module 3: Caribbean Experience: Return Migration of the West Indians**

- Unit 1 How to Define Caribbean Literature
- Unit 2 Origins of Caribbean Literature and Its Evolution in the Twentieth Century
- Unit 3 First and Second Generation, Caribbean Writers and Themes of the Works
- Unit 4 The Search for Identity
- Unit 5 Caribbean Experience and Carly Phillip's Literary Relevance

## **Module 4: Comparative Black Literature and Post-colonialism: Pillars, Periods and Themes**

- Unit 1 The Postcolonial Theory
- Unit 2 Critical Approaches to Post-colonial Literary Texts
- Unit 3 Aesthetics of Identity in Post-colonial Literature
- Unit 4 The Autotelic Self in Postcolonial Literature
- Unit 5 Multicultural, Hybridity and Migration

## **Module 5: Postcolonial Feminist Theory: An Aesthetic Model for African-American and Caribbean Women Works**

- Unit 1 Time, Change and Women
- Unit 2 Feminism and the Black Woman
- Unit 3 Womanism and Identity in Caribbean Literature
- Unit 4 Developing a New Multicultural Feminist Model

## **Module 6: Representations of Black Womanhood in African-American & Caribbean Literary Realism**

- Unit 1 Phillis Wheatley
- Unit 2 Zora Neale Hurston
- Unit 3 Alice Walker
- Unit 4 Toni Morison

Unit 5 Jamaica Kincaid and Audre Lorde

**Module 7: Reading Caribbean Writing: A Cross-Cultural Approach to Representations of Selected Caribbean Works**

Unit 1 V.S. Naipaul  
 Unit 2 George Lamming  
 Unit 3 Ralph Elision  
 Unit 4 Richard Wright  
 Unit 5 Diriye Osman

The essence of a comprehensive provision of the units is to guide and ensure a painstaking and critical study of the sub-themes under each module. The module and units provide a wide and exploratory coverage of the course contents and course outline of the course.

**TEXTBOOKS AND REFERENCES**

Andrews, W. L. (1986). *To Tell a Free Story: The First Century of Afro-American Autobiography, 1760-1865*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.

Baker, H. A., Jr. (1987). *Blues, Ideology, and African-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Baker, H. A., Jr. (1987). *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Bruce, D. D., Jr. (2001). *The Origins of African American Literature, 1680-1865*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia.

Chaney, M. (2007). *Fugitive Vision: Slave Image and Black Identity in Antebellum Narrative*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Gray, R. (2012). *A History of American literature* (4th ed.). Wiley-Blackwell.

Hourston, Z. N. (1981). *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press.

Hughes, L. (1999). The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain. *Literature: an Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, and Drama* (7th ed.), 1025-6. Longman.

Hutcheon, L. (1988). *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. New York: Routledge.

Jacobs, H. (1988). *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Huggins, N. (Ed.). (1976). *Voices from the Harlem Renaissance*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Hutchinson, G. (Ed.). (2007). *The Cambridge Companion to the Harlem Renaissance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wintz, C. D. (1988). *Black Culture and the Harlem Renaissance*. Houston, TX: Rice University Press.

## **ASSIGNMENT FILE**

This file contains the details of all the assignments you must do and submit to your tutor for marking. The mark you obtain from these assignments, will form a part of the final mark you will obtain in this course.

## **PRESENTATION SCHEDULE**

The presentation schedule included in your course materials gives you the important dates for the completion of your tutor-marked assignments and when you will attend tutorials. Remember that you are required to submit your assignments according to the schedule.

## **ASSESSMENT**

There are two aspects of assignments in this course. The first aspect includes all the tutor-marked assignments, while the second is the written examination.

In tackling the assignments, you are expected to apply the information and knowledge you acquired during the course.

The assignments must be submitted to your tutor for formal assessment in accordance with the deadlines stated in the assignment file. The work you submit to your tutor for assessment account for 30% of the total mark accruing to the course. At the end of the course, you will sit for a final three-hour examination that will carry 70% of the total course mark.

## **TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

Each unit has a tutor-marked assignment. You are expected to submit all the assignments. You should be able to do the assignments from the

knowledge you deduced from the course, and information you acquired from the textbooks.

When you have completed the assignment for each unit, send it along with your TMA (tutor-marked assignment) from your tutor. Make sure that the completed assignment reaches your tutor on or before the deadline in the assignment file. If you cannot complete your assignment on time, due to a cogent reason, consult your tutor for possible extension of time.

## FINAL EXAMINATION AND GRADING

The final examination for ENG 817 will be for the duration of three hours. The examination will carry 70%. It will consist of questions that will reflect the type of self-testing practice exercise and tutor-marked assignments you have come across. All areas of the course will be examined.

You are advised to revise the entire course after studying the last unit before you sit for examination. You will find the revision of your tutor-marked assignments equally useful.

## COURSE MARKING SCHEME

The table below shows how actual course marking is broken down.

Assessment	Marks
Assignments 1-4	Four assignments, best three marks of the four counts as 30% of course mark
Final Examination	70% of overall course marks
Total	100% of course marks

Table 1: Course marking scheme

## COURSE OVERVIEW

The table below brings together, the units the number of weeks you should take to complete them, and the assignments that follow them.

Unit	Title of Work	Week's Activity	Assessment (End of Unit)
	Course Guide	1	
<b>Module 1</b>			
1	Slavery in the Caribbean		Assignment
2	Abolition		Assignment
3	The Post-Emancipation Caribbean		Assignment
4	Implications on Criticism		Assignment

5	Major Writers from the Caribbean		Assignment
1	Fugitive and Ex-Slave Narratives		Assignment
2	Harlem Renaissance or the New Negro Movement		Assignment
3	The Civil Rights Era and the Black Arts Movement(Black Aesthetics 1960s-1970s)		Assignment
4	The Post-Modern Turn in African-American Literature and the Neo-Slave Narratives		Assignment
5	Contemporary Writers: The Literary Movements in African-American Background		Assignment
<b>Module 3</b>			
1	How to Define Caribbean Literature		Assignment
2	Origins of Caribbean Literature and Its Evolution in the Twentieth Century		Assignment
3	First and Second Generation Caribbean Writers and the Themes of their Works		Assignment
4	The Search for Identity		Assignment
5	Caribbean Experience and Caryl Phillip's Literary Relevance		Assignment
<b>Module 4</b>			
1	The Postcolonial Theory		Assignment
2	Critical Approaches to Post-colonial Literary Texts		Assignment
3	Aesthetics of Identity in Post-colonial Literature		Assignment
4	The Autotelic Self in Postcolonial Literature		Assignment
5	Multicultural, Hybridity and Migration		Assignment

<b>Module 5</b>			
1	Time, Change and Women		Assignment
2	Feminism and the Black Woman		Assignment
3	Womanism and Identity in Caribbean Literature		Assignment
4	Developing a New Multi-cultural Feminist Model		Assignment
<b>Module 6</b>			
1	Phillis Wheatley		Assignment
2	Zora Neale Hurston		Assignment
3	Alice Walker		Assignment
4	Toni Morison		Assignment
5	Jamaica Kincaid and Audre Lorde		Assignment
<b>Module 7</b>			
1	V.S. Naipaul		Assignment
2	George Lamming		Assignment
3	Ralph Elision		Assignment
4	Richard Wright		Assignment
5	Dirige Osman		Assignment

## HOW TO GET THE MOST FROM THIS COURSE

In distance learning, the study units replace the university lecture. This is one of the advantages of distance learning: you can read and work through specially designed study materials at your own pace, and at a time and place that suit you best. Think of it as reading the lecture instead of listening to a lecturer. In the same way that a lecturer might set for you some reading to do, the study units tell you when to read your set of books or other materials. Just as a lecturer might give you an in-class exercise, your study units provide exercises for you to do at appropriate time.

Each of the study units are written according to common format. The first item is an introduction to the subject matter of the unit and how a particular unit is integrated with the other units and of course as a whole. Next is a set of learning objectives. These objectives guide you on what you should be able to do by the time you have completed the unit. You should use these objectives to guide your study. When you have completed the units, you must go back and check whether you have achieved the objectives. This habit will improve your chance of passing the course.

**READING SECTION**

Remember that your tutor's job is to help you. So, when you need help of any sort, call on him or her. Do not fail to do so.

1. Read this Course Guide thoroughly
2. Organise a study schedule or time table. Refer to the course overview for more detail. Note the time you expected to spend on each unit, and how the assignments relate to the units.
3. Once you have created your own study schedule, do everything you can to stick to it. The major reasons students fail is that they lag behind in their course work. If you get into any difficulty with your schedule, do let your tutor know it before it is too late for help.
4. Turn to unit one and read the introduction and the objectives for the unit
5. Assemble the study materials. Information about what you need for a unit is given in the overview at the beginning of each unit. You will always almost need both the study unit you are working on and one of your books on your table at the same time.
6. Work through the unit. The content of the unit itself has been arranged to provide a sequence for you to follow. As you work through the unit, you will be instructed to read sections from your set books or articles. Use the unit to guide your reading.
7. Review the objectives for each study unit to confirm that you have achieved them. If you feel unsure about any of the objectives, review the study material or consult your tutor.
8. When you are confident that you have achieved a unit's objectives, you can then start on the next unit. Proceed unit by unit through the course and try to pace your study so that you keep yourself on schedule.
9. When you have submitted an assignment to your tutor for marking, do not wait for its return before starting on the next unit. Keep to your schedule. When the assignment is returned, pay particular attention to your tutor's comments, both on the tutor-marked assignment form and also on what is written on the assignment. Consult your tutor as soon as possible if you have any questions or problems.
10. After completing the last, review the course and prepare yourself for the final examination. Ensure that you have achieved the unit objectives (listed at the beginning of each unit) and the course objectives (listed in this Course Guide)

**FACILITATORS/ TUTORS AND TUTORIALS**

There are eight hours of tutorials provided in support of this course. You will be notified of the dates, time and location of these tutorials, with the name and phone number of your tutor, as soon as you are allocated a

tutorial group. Your tutor will mark and comment on your assignments, keep close watch on your progress and on any difficulties you might encounter and provide assistance to you during the course. You must mail your tutor-marked assignments to your tutor well before the due date (at least two working days are required). They will be marked by your tutor and returned to you as soon as possible. Do not hesitate to contact your tutor by telephone, e-mail, or discussion board if you need help. The following might be circumstances in which you will find help necessary.

**CONTACT YOUR TUTOR IF:**

- You do not understand any part of the study units or the assigned readings
- You have difficulty with the self-tests or exercises
- You have a question or problem with an assignment, your tutor's comments on assignment, or with the grading of an assignment.

You should try your best to attend tutorials. This is the only chance to have face to face contact with your tutor and ask questions which are answered instantly. You can raise any problem encountered in the course of your study. To gain the maximum benefit from course tutorials, prepare a question list before attending them. You will learn a lot from participating in discussions actively.

**SUMMARY**

ENG 817: African-American & Caribbean Literature simply explains the historical background of African- American & Caribbean literature, and its surviving contributions and roles in the comparative black literature. By the end of this course, students should be able to answer questions bordering on:

The Hispanophone, Anglophone, and Francophone legacies historically connect the entire Caribbean through the projects of modernity and empire; and in the present former colonies have strong migration flows to their former colonial power.

The writing in African-American and Caribbean literature reflects how Caribeños created new cultures, languages, and identities through their survival and resistance. This course examines prolific and sometimes understudied writers and their contributions to Caribbean literature and diasporic literature. The students will also learn how intersectional oppressions affect people's daily livelihoods and how the social constructions of race and gender, for example, are necessary points of inquiry. In this course students will learn how colonialism and modernity still affect the Caribbean and how people in various islands of

the Caribbean and its diaspora (in the U.S.A. and England, for example) negotiate empire, post colonialism, identity, language, culture gender, and notions of home. Etc.

The course is a captivating course that requires voracious grip and diversified skills and comprehension. This course has been well-designed and constructed to equip the students with these multi-faceted components. Happy reading!

**MODULE 1****INTRODUCTION**

The Hispanophone, Anglophone, and Francophone legacies historically connect the entire Caribbean through the projects of modernity and empire; and in the present former colonies have strong migration flows to their former colonial power. This need to migrate, feelings of non-belonging, experiences of oppression and discrimination, and cultural hybridity are realities Caribbean migrants share. The writing in Caribbean literature reflects how Caribeños created new cultures, languages, and identities through their survival and resistance. This course examines prolific and sometimes understudied writers and their contributions to Caribbean literature and diasporic literature. While this is an introductory segment, students will also learn how intersectional oppressions affect people's daily livelihoods and how the social constructions of race and gender, for example, are necessary points of inquiry. In this course students will learn how colonialism and modernity still affect the Caribbean and how people in various islands of the Caribbean and its diaspora (in the U.S.A. and England, for example) negotiate empire, identity, language, culture, and notions of home. This course also examines how diaspora influences Caribbean livelihoods and experiences which is reflected in writing. These experiences shed light on what it means to be a product of diaspora, how the legacies of colonialism, imperialism, and modernity affect Caribbean nations and people, and how migration is natural—although sometimes forced. It is anticipated that the students will develop an understanding as to how the Caribbean nations are similar in many ways but also unique and dissimilar.

**Objectives**

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- (1) Identify and discuss important literary figures and texts from the Caribbean and its diaspora.
- (2) Understand Caribbean history, culture, and identities and how they are represented in literary canons using academic texts, cultural texts, and other sources.
- (3) Identify the main argument and focus of an author. Analyze, compare, and contrast themes and arguments across readings in different historical contexts and genres.

## MAIN CONTENT

The history of the founding and settling of the Caribbean has implications for the societies that have emerged. Following the accidental “discovery” of the place in 1492 by Christopher Columbus, the Caribbean environment has been a fertile ground for writers whose recreations and explorations of their locale as ways of examining the relations between the land, the people, the psychological dimensions of their situations prefigure their determined struggle to survive, and bond together as ways of defining their humanity and dignity. This course examines this peculiar history of the Caribbean as well as its attendant effect on the criticism of the literature of that area. It also highlights the various literary responses of the individual writers of this region to these historical realities.

The history of the Caribbean is peculiar. It does not evolve gradually and naturally out of a remote mythological and archaeological past, but begins abruptly with the “discovery” of the Bahamas in 1492 by Christopher Columbus. This abrupt beginning has led historians like Eric Williams (1970) and literary artists like V.S. Naipaul (1969) to assert that the Caribbean is merely a geographical expression which lacks a noteworthy history. Naipaul, in particular, claims that the West Indies is a sterile, static, manufactured society due to the accidental nature of its discovery and the brutal mode of occupation and violence among the colonizing forces. Many Caribbean scholars have also concluded that the area is “historyless” and unlikely to proceed further than its crude and violent beginnings. According to Naipaul, “history is built on creation and achievement and nothing was created in the West Indies”, (1969, p. 39).

This lack of creation refers to the dearth of monuments, libraries and other visible public amenities other than the remains of old plantation houses and memoirs of the slave experience. The European colonizers regarded the area as one whose economic potentials were to be fully exploited, but not a place to settle in permanently. This was why the plantation system was entrenched and thence, the proliferation of absentee landlords who enjoyed the fruits of their labour outside the West Indies. And so, the problem with West Indian history does not lie solely in its mode of discovery as there was also the problem of jealousy and in-fighting among the colonizers who were single-minded in their quest for quick self-profit.

Initially, Columbus thought that the West Indies would open up a lucrative trade route for Spain. Also, because of the proliferation of gold body ornaments on the Bahamans he had met, Columbus concluded that there was an inexhaustible supply of gold to be obtained from the West

Indies. Thus, his primary interest was the economic exploitation, and not the improvement of the area. Later on, it was discovered that the gold supply was finite and the colonizer's attention turned to the large-scale cultivation of sugar which was then a highly lucrative crop.

At all times, the European presence in the Caribbean was primarily motivated by selfish economic considerations. Because of this, they did not hesitate to undercut one another and eventually seek all inhumane means of obtaining a steady supply of easily replaceable labour for the effective cultivation of their plantations.

The West Indies can be referred to as an artificially created society because with the exception of the indigenous Indian population which was largely swiftly exterminated, the inhabitants of the Caribbean either migrated or were forcibly transported there. With this conglomeration of people of different races and religious beliefs and with different motives of being in the Caribbean, it was difficult to create a common Caribbean ethos, especially, given the fundamental inequalities created by the institution of slavery.

During Columbus's second trip to the Caribbean in 1493, he brought Spanish domestic cereals, vegetables, fruits and sugar cane to the West Indies. It is therefore; correct to regard the West Indians as an imported people in a largely imported environment. The early and later imperialists in the Caribbean had the sole motive of exploiting the natural, mineral and agricultural resources of the area both for personal benefits and for the good of their various mother countries.

The lure of gold, sugar and slaves thus precipitated imperialist forays into the area by Spain, Portugal, Britain, France and the Netherlands. Each of these imperialists fought to obtain a considerable share of the Caribbean wealth. And this gave rise naturally to piracy, double-crossing, brutality and lack of cohesion among the powers. Each group of Europeans had its own language, religion and political allegiances. They were also constantly engaged in the bid to protect or expand their territories and so had little opportunity or need to exert a unified political and cultural control over the non-European population.

Furthermore, the Europeans' inability to impose a common creolised cultural ethos on the slaves who were also multi-cultural in origin was exacerbated by the imperialists' lack of interest in the continuous spiritual and physical welfare of the Islands and its inhabitants. As a result, the Negro slaves were largely left to evolve their own cultural expressions and value systems based on vestiges of different African traditions, various European influences and communal responses to the new milieu.

**Slavery in the Caribbean**

The Spaniards who were the original imperialists in the Caribbean already had a system of slavery which made it easy for them to resort to this method of procuring labour for their mines and plantations. Several sources of labour, including aboriginal Indians, white slaves and convicts labour were sought before blacks were brought into the West Indies. Negro slavery was initiated by the king of Spain on September 3, 1501 and began with the transportation of numbers of Christian negro slaves from Spain to the West Indies. African slave trade began shortly afterwards.

The mining of gold and to a greater extent, the discovery of the great economic potential of sugar-cultivation in the world market precipitated the institutionalization of slavery in the West Indies. Plantation slavery began in the 16th century and from that time onwards, the fortunes of the Islands were greatly influenced by the price of sugar. Also, the requirements of the sugar industry determined the nature of the West Indian population.

The cultivation of cane was highly capital-and-labour-intensive. The more sophisticated and efficient machines for extracting sugar were expensive and the crop itself was highly perishable which meant that it had to be processed shortly after harvesting. Also, the planting and harvesting of cane required considerable labour and the manufacturing process was arduous. The production of sugar on an economic scale therefore, required a considerable initial financial outlay and a large cheap labour force. Negro slavery provided easily available and replaceable unskilled labour. It also led to a change in the racial composition and social structure of the Islands.

Under slavery, the humanity of the blacks was progressively eroded, especially with the arduous work hours, stringent penalties for absenteeism and the promulgation of slave codes which gave legal sanction to slavery. These codes deprived the slaves of the freedom of movement and the simplest exercise of their freewill. For instance, they could not marry without their masters' permission, could not own property, were considered to be moveable property and could be punished even unto death by their masters.

This brutally indifferent method of slavery, coupled with the racial and cultural diversity found in the West Indies and the displacement and dispossession experienced by the African slaves helped to rob the Negroes of a sense of historical continuity and emphasized the lack of control over their lives. It also gave rise to such psychological traumas as alienation, rootlessness, inferiority complex and the creation of the colonial mentality. The cultivation of cane was thus, the basic reason for

the institution of slavery and had important influences on the Caribbean psyche, such as the engendering of the isolationist outlook and an endemic and crippling sense of provincialism, all of which are difficult to eradicate from the 21st century Caribbean mentality.

### **Tutor-Marked Assignment**

1. Discuss the history of Caribbean background and its relevance in Caribbean literary works.
2. How does slavery contribute to the history and epoch-making experience in Caribbean tradition?
3. How does the cultivation of **cane** relate to the institution of slavery in the Caribbean psyche?

### **Abolition**

There were three basic reasons for the abolition of slavery: economic, political and humanitarian. By the 19th century, the cultivation of sugar in the British and French West Indian colonies was no longer economically viable because cheaper sugar was obtainable from India and Brazil. Sugar producers in the colonies discovered that they produced sugar at a greater cost than its selling price, thus making it difficult for the plantation owners to make profit after caring for the needs of the slaves.

Politically, the abolitionist move was part of the increasing global moves by the industrial bourgeoisie against the landed aristocracy, such as the French revolution of 1789 and the victory of the North over the South in the American civil war.

On humanitarian grounds, slavery was considered the height of man's inhumanity to man and so, such figures as William Wilberforce sought the legal end to the institution of slavery. Abolition Acts were passed in Denmark in 1803, Great Britain in 1807, France in 1817 and Holland in 1818, while slavery was legally abolished in the British colonies in 1833, French colonies in 1848, and Dutch colonies in 1863.

### **Tutor-Marked Assignment**

1. What were the basis reasons for abolition of slavery in Caribbean tradition?
2. Discuss the humanitarian grounds on the issue of slavery in the Caribbean background?

### **The Post-Emancipation Caribbean**

The post-emancipation period did not usher in immediate fundamental changes in the lives of the slaves. Financially, they were ill-equipped for freedom, yet many preferred to survive through subsistence farming or seasonal itinerant labour rather than work long hours for meagre wages

in the plantations of their erstwhile masters. This created a vacuum in the labour force which was later filled by the migration of indentured Indian labourers to the West Indies. This waves of migration started in 1838 and ended in 1924 within which period approximately half a million Indians migrated to the Caribbean. This introduced new racial, linguistic and cultural complications into the already diversified West Indian society. The Caribbean thus, became a deterministic society where social status was predicated on skin pigmentation and people were divided into exclusive water-tight colour compartments. This situation intensified the psychosis nurtured by a sense of racial and cultural void or inferiority which began with the slavery.

Education in the early period of colonial rule was designed to impart the rudiments of reading, writing and moral instructions to the blacks. That which was initially organized by the missionaries underscored the subordinate and acquiescent status of the negroes, vis-a-vis their white masters. Later on, the blacks were tutored in foreign history, literary and musical traditions and even the value system of the Metropolis was imposed wholesale on them.

The blacks responded in several ways, which included the total acceptance of foreign values which pre-supposed a negation of one's racial roots. There was also the rejection of Western values and a nostalgic attachment to vestiges of folk tradition, or, a judicious blend of the best of both cultures. This situation gave rise to the creation of a plural society.

The post-emancipation West Indies was thus, still strongly under foreign domination through colonialism. As a result, there exists in the Caribbean a complex situation created by the existence and interlocking of two different sets of cultural values. There is a foreign derived metropolitan culture which is mostly seen among the upper and middle classes and the black Creole culture which contains many African-derived elements and is practised mainly by the lower classes. Thus, the various social classes act and think differently and one class is elevated and aspired towards, to the detriment of the other. The upper and middle classes speak Standard English, contract legal marriages and practise the religion and culture of their former European masters. The lower classes on the other hand, generally speak the Creole dialect, engage in fetish practices such as the worship of gods like Shango, gold, and Ifa and usually do not contract legal marriages.

The Caribbean has, therefore, been described as a plural society made up of people displaying different modes of behaviour and who are held together by economic reasons, rather than by a sense of belonging to a common culture. This divisive unity was the result of different responses

and modes of adjustment to the void created by dispossession. The slave ancestors had been dispossessed of their motherlands and forced to live in an alien and hostile milieu in which they were made to feel racially and culturally inferior. This deep-seated sense of inferiority and lack of confidence became intensified by the focus of colonial education which encouraged further amnesia and shame about the African past and pushed the blacks towards accepting Europe as good.

There have therefore, been various literary responses to the realities of the Caribbean historical experience. Some writers, especially, white West Indian writers are apologetic about this history. Some reject the West Indies and claim Africa as their spiritual home, while others reject the concept of Africa and take their cues from Europe. The various writers also hold different concepts about West Indian history. They generally act as spokespersons of their society. They analyze and interpret societal ills and consistently endeavour to make the people aware of their endemic shortcomings and seek positive and enduring responses to the milieu.

And so, there is in Caribbean literature the predominance of the alienation theme in various forms: homelessness, rootlessness and exile. It is a situation of being a part of what you could not become. So, the primary cultural commitment of Caribbean writers remains the search for identity and self-discovery. George Lamming describes this situation as paradoxical since it insists on roots and rootlessness; home and homelessness at the same time. The fragmented nature of the society gives the West Indian an acute sense of exile and because the literature of this area reflects and attempts to come to terms with the consequences of colonization, Edward Baugh describes it as "colonial literature", (1978, p.13). Caribbean literature then, was to celebrate a new ethos and identity. It established the West Indian identity as different from the European, and neither is it African, Chinese nor Indian but a strange and pleasurable mixture of all these. The writer in the New World then, is engaged in an attempt at articulating a trueness of being.

### **Tutor-Marked Assignment**

1. The wave of migration started in 1838 and ended in 1924, during the Post-Emancipation Caribbean. Discuss the historical concerns of Post-Emancipation Caribbean.
2. What was the characterized educational subject that was tutored during the Post-Emancipation Caribbean? Discuss extensively.
3. What is the new ethos and identity Caribbean literature celebrates? Discuss.

### Implications on Criticism

Bearing the burden of this debilitating history and environment, the criticism of Caribbean literature has often been jaundiced. Primarily, the criticism encapsulates an attitude which sees the visions expressed by the writers as "pessimistic", especially with regard to Naipaul's works. As artistic mediators of their locale and historical experience, the argument seems to have been that the unrelieved gloom of their circumstances, the apparent absence of any controlling moral centre, makes the only logical, possible, realistic portraiture absurd, depressing and hopeless. For instance, commenting on the burden of a depressing West Indian history, Rose Acholonu observes that "the dehumanizing influence of colonization... is as damaging as it is permanent" (1987, p.78). An important implication of this observation is the view that the Caribbean man cannot live down the problem of imposed acculturation. However, contrary to the above assertion, time and events have proved that the Caribbean man can evolve a new image in the modern world out of past and present experiences and thus, transcend his alien environment. The emergence in the first place of Caribbean literature as distinct from European, African, Chinese or Indian literature is a step in the positive direction and shows that the West Indian has a future. As Derek Walcott points out, history is not only that which is celebrated by "ruins of castles and forts but is also the chronicle of the past of the common man and his deeds □ the fisherman with his mongrel walking on the beach" (Brodber, 1983, p.13). Creative history also accounts for the present and projects into the future. Walcott continues: "you who feel the pain of historylessness, look at the work patterns, the dances, the dreams, the songs and the memories of your forefathers, analyze these and you will be writing your history" (Brodber, 1983, p.3). Walcott also advises that it is the duty of the West Indian to possess his land, tame and cultivate it and finally produce something original, for the West Indian "behind all his roles and faces, possesses the possibility of a rich, complex and an integrated self which is his by virtue of his exile" (Hirsch, 1979, p.285). As Gerald Moore notes, "...even if the West Indians had created nothing else, they have certainly created a people" (Moore, 1969, p.8). Walcott insists that it would be abhorrent to him to say "I wish we were English again" or "I wish we were African again", that the reality is that, one has to build in the West Indies (Hirsch, 1979, p.285).

Walcott's position became vindicated when in 1992 he got the world's highest literary acclaim by winning the Nobel Prize for literature, a feat, which was repeated by Naipaul a few years later. This, apart from being a reward and recognition of individual excellence, is also a celebration of Caribbean literature, and since literature is a celebration of life, the Nobel Prize indirectly proclaims and recognizes Caribbean life as valid and authentic. And so, quite contrary to the claim that history exerts a

definitive influence on the creative imagination, it is evident that the Caribbean man can live down the vagaries of history and transcend his alien milieu.

The terms "Caribbean" and "West Indian" are used interchangeably by many people in discussing the literature of this particular portion of the earth. However, "Caribbean" embraces the literature in all the languages of the area □ English, French, Spanish and Dutch □ but by "West Indian", it is meant only the writings of those Island and Mainland territories where English is the official language and the chief medium of literary composition. In this study, therefore, by "Caribbean" it is meant the literature of the English-speaking Caribbean, otherwise known as West Indian literature.

### **Tutor-Marked Assignment**

1. Discuss the critical pains Caribbean Literature held on criticism.
2. Discuss the predominance and influence of Walcott and Naipaul in Caribbean literature.
3. Simply explain the intersecting bond between Caribbean and West Indian.

### **Major Writers from the Caribbean**

While the major writers from the Caribbean are Derek Walcott, Edward Brathwaite, V.S Naipaul, Samuel Selvon, George Lamming, Roger Mais and Michael Anthony, others include V.S. Reid, Orlando Patterson, Earl Lovelace, Jean Rhys, Martin Carter, Geoffrey Drayton, Edgar Mittleholzer, Merle Hodge, Zee Edgell, Alvin Bennett, Errol John, John Hearne, H.D. Delisser, Jacques Roumain, Ian McDonald, Joseph Zobel, Denis Williams, Simone Schwarz-Bart, and Glissant Garth St. Orner.

It is important to note that the Caribbean authors are of the belief that servitude to the muse of history can only result in a literature that is sociological, self-pitying and full of revenge. To him, history is fiction which is subject to the vagaries of memory and thus, opens to misinterpretations or re-interpretations. He, therefore, ignores the claim that history exerts a definitive influence on the creative imagination and rather conceives of the New World Negro as an "Adam" who has suffered amnesia of the past and is therefore, free to move forward in time and have a new life for himself in his New World. Poet, dramatist and Nobel laureate for literature, Walcott's publications include: *T-Jean and his brothers* (1970), *Dream on Monkey Mountain* (1970), *The Sea at Dolphin* (1970) and several volumes of poetry.

Edward Brathwaite, another writer from the Caribbean however, sees the task of the Caribbean writer as being the rehabilitation of the colonial mind through making the West Indian accept folk ways, music and orature and more importantly, shape these things into a tangible

literary tradition from which other writers can draw inspiration. Brathwaite believes that the black man who rejects his racial memory is doomed to endless migrations and rootlessness because he can neither define himself in terms of an attachment to Africa, nor in terms of Europe which exploits and manipulates his life. He therefore, suggests very strongly a recapitulation of the past, but since this, according to him might not be easy and will involve the excavation of painful memories, Brathwaite does not hold out any ready or easy solutions for the dispossessed New World black. The *arrivants* (1973) which is a trilogy is one of his major publications.

Often referred to as the prophet of doom, (Richards, 1991, p.32), V.S. Naipaul sees the history of the Caribbean as a recurrent void which is characterized by brutality, sterility and lack of visible achievements. According to Naipaul, "history is built on creation and achievement and nothing was created in the West Indies" (1969, p.43).

A dominant feature of Naipaul's writing is the presentation and exploration of characters who are either failures because of their inability to express and realize their full potentials, or characters who are charlatans and mediocre but who, nevertheless, are precipitated into success by the sheer mediocrity and formlessness of the society. To Naipaul, the Caribbean is a place which deliberately denies itself his heroes and is incapable of recognizing and nurturing artistic potentials. Also, the diverse groups of people who inhabit the Islands in Naipaul's view are not bound by any sense of belonging to one culture. As a result, there is the creation of the formless, casual society with haphazard standards and the emergence of the confused, unaccommodated man who is helpless and cast in a sterile and unfriendly landscape. His works include: *A Bend in the river* (1979), *A flag on the island* (1969), *An area of darkness* (1968), *Guerillas* (1975), *In a free state* (1971), *Miguel street* (1974), *Mr. Stone and the knight's companion* (1963), *The mimic men* (1967), *The suffrage of Elvira* (1969), *The middle passage* (1969), *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1969) and *The Mystic masseur* (1971). Clearly, Naipaul is the most prolific Caribbean writer.

The direct opposite of Naipaul's vision is Samuel Selvon's. As a writer, Selvon's historical sense is informed by his optimistic vision of man's ability to transcend the drawbacks of a debilitating past, hence, his being referred to as the "optimistic visionary *parexculture*" (Acholonu, 1987, p.87). Selvon's fictional world centres around the life, customs, beliefs and speech patterns of the peasant West Indian. He reveals the strengths and weaknesses of this world and projects a possible blend of the best of both West Indian and Western ways as the ideal way of coping with a changing contemporary world. Selvon consistently shows that without a fundamental attachment to the beneficial aspects of

folkways, the West Indian, whether in Trinidad or abroad is liable to become adrift. He also shows that an inherited sense of racial prejudice is detrimental to progress in the modern world and projects a future in which West Indians will be able to ignore racial differentiations and work for the general good. This vision is conveyed mostly through his fiction which includes: *An island is a world* (1955), *Moses ascending* (1984), *Moses migrating* (1983), *The lonely Londoners* (1989), *Ways of sunlight* (1979), *A brighter sun* (1979), and *Turn again Tiger* (1979).

George Lamming's vision is similar to Brathwaite's. Like the latter, Lamming believes that history is continuous and holds salient lessons for the contemporary society and that without a positive recapitulation of the past, the contemporary Caribbean will be unable to respond positively to his milieu. And so, an intimate contact with the past is necessary in order to chart the path of future progress. This vision is conveyed through his *In the castle of my skin* (1953).

Roger Mais is another renowned writer from the Caribbean. Mais's fictional world is specifically that of the urban dispossessed in Kingston, Jamaica, but his observations about human life are universal. Accordingly, Mais sets his novels like *The hills were joyful together* (1953) and *Brother man* (1974) in urban slums in Kingston, and exposes the lives of the yard-dwellers in all their stark, squalid, deprived and dehumanized horror: they are rootless, hopeless, brutalized, poor, and have broken homes. They also engage in all forms of moral laxity. At the same time, Mais shows the possibility of the existence of positive emotions and intentions in this world. And so, his fictional world is one of paradoxes in which defeat and success, sloth and industry, piety and lawlessness, caring and hatred exist simultaneously. Mais projects that man is trapped in a tragic world of continuous sufferings and reversals. Man's actions, Mais maintains are without apparent reasons and his fortunes are at the mercy of an abstract, indifferent and often merciless universal force called "fate". But directly contrary to this is the author's conviction that man holds the key to his salvation and that the very existence of the paradoxes of experience testifies to the possibility of man improving himself in the face of tremendous odds. Fundamentally, therefore, Mais's vision is that in their confrontation with an implacable and unpredictable fate, the urban dispossessed of the West Indies need to rely on themselves and seek redemption either from within themselves or within their group.

Another popular writer from the Caribbean is Michael Anthony although his works generally avoid the exploration of contemporary socio-political issues and also rarely reflect a well-defined sense of commitment to the future of the West Indies. In the stories in *Cricket in the road* (1965) and *The year in San Fernando* (1973), the author

highlights different facets of traditional life in such a way as would imply that he advocates the upholding of the values of this world while grudgingly acknowledging the inevitability of the incursion of Western values. He projects a vision of a traditional and practically untouched West Indies which West Indians must be encouraged to appreciate. Anthony appears to consider the writer's responsibility as being predicated on his obligation to make West Indians aware of the inner beauty and integrity of the traditional milieu. Consequently, his presentation of this world is simplistic, idealistic and precludes any intense critical analysis of the merits or otherwise of traditional life so that while being aware of the inevitability of change, Mais does not appear to be actively engaged in preparing West Indians for the positive and negative repercussions of this change. Ultimately, Anthony's vision centres on the assumption that the attachment to traditional roots, irrespective of their drawbacks is the most viable means of confronting incipient change. He also suggests that the destruction of this traditional way of life or abdication from it would be tantamount to metaphorical death. His other titles include: *Green days by the river* (1973), *The games were coming* (1977) and *All that glitters* (1983).

### **Conclusion**

The profuse exploration so far, has provided her readers a critical discourse embodying the peculiar history of the Caribbean as well as its attendant effect on its literature and criticism since Caribbean literature is also to some extent, a response by the individual writers to the historical realities of the area. It is evident to the assertion that history exerts a definitive influence on the creative imagination (as it is argued by some scholars), the Caribbean man can live down the ravages of history and transcend his alien milieu.

### **Summary**

Since Caribbean literature is largely a response by the individual writers to the historical realities of the area, Derek Walcott believes that the West Indian must move towards refashioning the present. The West Indian, Walcott believes, must overcome the sense of inferiority and lack of cohesion which is the heritage of dispossession and alienation. Walcott also tackles the issue of the West Indian loyalty to at least two cultures: one, indigenous, and the other, foreign. He maintains that for true nationalism to exist and for the authentic Caribbean personality to emerge, one cannot adopt one culture to the neglect of the other. Walcott consistently blends elements of the two cultures in his works and even attempts to re-evaluate certain aspects of colonial history.

**Tutor-Marked Assignment**

1. Discuss four prominent influential biographical writers from Caribbean literary background.
2. What is the subject matter of Walcott's works as concern Caribbean society?
3. Caribbean literature is a response by the individual writers to the historical realities of the Caribbean society. Justify or contradict this claim with your plausible response.

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## **MODULE 2: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN LITERATURE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

African- American literature as a course, explores the major genres, themes and criticisms which compose the literary and cultural traditions of African Americans. Selected oral narratives, essays, slave narratives, poetry, short stories, autobiographies, drama and novels will be critically studied. Attention is given to historical, cultural and socio-political backgrounds. It emphasis will be placed on the shaping influences of the island's rich mystical heritage and on questions of personal identity. The effects of slavery, African cultural survivals, and the role played by the English, French and Spanish colonials, white creoles, mulattos and blacks in forming the cultural mosaic of the island will be studied.

### **Objectives**

The objectives of this unit is to make us see detailed illustration and elucidation will be given in order to have a clear and unambiguous knowledge and understanding of themes and thoughts developed by the Black writers. Writers have their own viewpoints considering the history, society and political set-up of the period. The present topic encompasses the analysis and interpretations of the historical background of African American writings.

### **Main Content**

The African-American literary tradition implies the culture and tradition of suppressed people. The suppressed and oppressed people of African American race and society are placed in the literary writings of the writers. The writers exhibit the plights and pathos of the people with their artistic and creative expressions in the form of plays, poems, fictions and stories. The creations are well recognized in the intellectual scenario of the world.

The African American writers are socio creative artists. It is an artistic form directly emanated from the collective social situation in which the Afro-American found himself. It is directly connected to the historical, economic, educational and social growth and development of people and as such maintains a unique position in the literature of world.

The socio-creative art is what the black writers bring into existence when they sit down to reflect. They ponder on their grievous situations. Their artistic expressions are the results of their deep thoughts and critical analysis of their tragic circumstances. Their lives and their art in the same struggle and every black writer is a product and part of black

community. When he addresses his audiences, he will be in part expressing the life and needs of their community. The frame of reference to which he relates is his community. They are what they are because of their peculiar nature of the people of the country.

Before understanding the origin of African American literature, it is important to know the main issues of that period. The issue of race and tensions of color pushed African Americans to use writing to establish a place for themselves in that community. The English contributed to the issue of segregation. They had developed the ideas of inferiority and distinction through drawing on preconceptions rooted in images of blackness and physical differences between the two peoples (Bruce 02). Those negative images were created by English adventurers and traders who visited the African Continent. The literature read at that time in England offered a negative portrayal of Africans and their ways of life. The Africans were described as brutal and ugly people (01). Early in the 18th century, laws excluded the testimony of the black in court especially in the South. In several colonies, the free black paid punitive taxation and were prohibited from owning property. In Virginia, some blacks lost the right to vote. They were brought against their will and many wives were separated from their husbands and were given to others (64).

African Americans were given different names like 'Colored' 'Negros' 'Black' and 'African American'. In fact, African American literature embodies novels, poems and plays showing the status of race as a whole. The writers' works reflect their identities (Warren 05). African American literature presents a wide range of writings from the colonial period to the present. It is related to different literary periods: The colonial period (1746-1800), antebellum period (1800-1865), the reconstruction period (1865-1900), the protest movement (1960-1969) and contemporary period (1970-present).

### **The Colonial Period (1746-1800)**

During the colonial period, African-American literature represents the divided self of Africans who were forced to go to colonial America. They were lost between their home land and their new identity. Some of them survived and the others died because of sickness and suicide. In 1700, Sewall declares that "It is likewise most lamentable to think, how in taking Negroes out of Africa, and setting them here, that which God has joined together men do boldly rend asunder; Men from their country, husbands from their wives, parents from children" (Bruce 17). One of the captured slaves who were transported to colonial America was Wheatley. In her writings, she focuses on the contrast between slavery and freedom (Jarrett 22). Due to the issue of racism, many African-American writings were not recognized as authentic works such

as Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs. Through poetry, sermons, letters and slave narratives, African American literature of the colonial period was a means of breaking the bonds of slavery. In New England, those slaves who were close with their masters' families exchanged stories and experiences with the audience. They described their lives before slavery in Africa and their daily activities. They portrayed the suffering felt by husbands and wives separated from each other as well as the separations of brothers from sisters and children from parents. Those stories suggest a kind of awareness of the issues of slavery (Dickson 20).

Most slaves adopted the religion of their masters which played an important role in early African American literature. "The religious concerns of early African-American writers reflects life in puritan America which dictated that literature be used, it served as a means of moral instruction" (77).

During the colonial period, African-American slaves were prohibited from learning some skills such as reading and writing. Thus, they used their creative abilities such as songs, folk tale and oral storytelling to talk about slavery. These works incorporate the dialect of early black Americans (Smith & Jones 07).

During the American revolutionary war (1775-1781), both Americans and Black soldiers participated together to fight the British. They wanted self-rule, equality and freedom. African-American writers of the period such as Wheatley Lucy Terry Prince, George Moses Horton tackled the status of African Americans and asked for freedom from the British tyranny (07). They discussed white Americans 'self and not slavery.

The issue of slavery and the revolutionary war led to the development of African American writings. Their poems and letters reflect the African-Americans' suffering.

The African-American literary tradition implies the fact that African-American culture is the culture of suppressed people. The history of African-American people is marked with slavery (1619-1865) which is characterized by continuous dehumanization, humiliation, racial segregation, and exploitation.

African-Americans were viewed as people with no history, no cultural heritage, no tradition, and no identity in white America. For centuries Europeans and Americans advanced racial theories of inferiority, this ascribed African-Americans to the lower species and ignored their ownership of cultural, ethic, and linguistic values. In an interview, one of the leading contemporary African-American authors, Toni Morrison

states that prejudice and racism against African-Americans has had two purposes: it has been a distraction against recognizing the unfair class differences in the country, and it has united as Americans all other immigrants, who can claim to be white and therefore part of the mainstream simply because they are not black (Morrison, 2008, 53). However, according to Morrison, America would not be what it is without the presence of blacks. The writer believes that America was “incoherent” without the inclusion of African-Americans’ contributions to the forming of the nation, its history, language, literature, and culture (Christian, 2000, 75). She presents a similar view in her book of essays on the presence of blackness in American literature *Playing in the Dark* (1992) in which she is trying to prove that Africanism is an inseparable part in defining Americanness. Thus Morrison views black American history as the history of whole American experience (Morrison, 1993, 14).

Slave trade was greatly related to racial prejudices and racial segregation. Although in 1865 slavery was abolished in America, the South was still governed by white politicians. Ku-Klux-Klan, an organization established in 1865, oppressed and terrorized the blacks. Racial inequality and stereotypes were imposed on all aspects of Black Americans’ lives-education, literature, music, art. Black women had to face a twofold struggle because they suffered both racial prejudice and sexual abuse by the white masters and black males. African-American women treated as slaves were depicted as animals and prostitutes, and this treatment created the imposed derogatory image of Black Jezebel. Likewise, the numerous literary portrayals and treatment of black-skinned people as the “Other,” as failing to live up to the standards of “normalcy” of white people by imposing negative meanings and stereotypes on them, were meant to legalize hierarchical racialized system and justify oppression in a white hegemonic American society. The negative stereotypes which defined and objectified them and which were internalized by many African-Americans (during the years of slavery until, roughly speaking, the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Movement in the 1960s) were their natural, inborn depravity, laziness, carelessness, irresponsibility, aggressiveness, illiteracy, docility, physical ugliness, and the like. In addition, Black women’s allegedly uncontrolled sexuality, their passionate nature was used to justify Black women’s sexual exploitation. Thus the objectification of Black Americans and their internalization of the stereotypes imposed on them allow one to speak about a “racialized” identity of African- American people.

Tradition advocates essential values, verbal and written monuments, which defy time, and are passed from one generation to another. Tradition also has a correlation between preservation of cultural heritage

and its innovation. Literary tradition is made of recurrent themes and forms of expression, whereas innovation and experiments can only be recognized against the tradition and manifests itself through the principle of intertextuality (Uzielienė, 2002, 1-2).

The African-American theorist, critic and writer Henry Louis Gates, Jr. claims that intertextuality is central to the African-American tradition. He emphasizes similarities of African-American texts, especially genre forms and linguistic models which fall into these traditions, since writers have the tendency to read and revise the works of other writers. Therefore repetition, careful study of previous cultural heritage, is reflected in the process of signifying, which marks the essence of African-American literary tradition. However, Gates goes on to claim, repetition and revision occurs with a signal difference. Signification manifests primarily through hidden textual meanings and is loaded with parody and pastiche, which in their turn correspond to motivated and unmotivated Signifying respectively. The author argues that traditional African-American texts have double formal antecedents, the Western and the Black, which gives double-voicedness to African-American literary tradition (Spikes, 1997, 44).

In African-American culture there is a link between the past and the present, a combination of cultural memory, the African experience and cosmogony (the origin of the universe, or a set of ideas about this). In the United States, the African tradition and experience was modified by the Christian one, a new type of culture and literature was being formed. Uzielienė states that the intentions to define Afro-American literary tradition have always led to contradictory questions, such as: what is uniquely Black or American about the literature by Black authors? What is the Black protagonist's identity – is it American or African-American? What is the African-American identity? Is Black literature of a racial or a more universal nature? What does it mean to be Black in White America? Therefore, at the heart of the Black experience there is the problem of double-consciousness (Uzielienė, 2002, 10). In the history of the African- American literary tradition there are two opposing cultural theories regarding the problem being confronted. One theory is "integrationist" and argues that the Black man must strive to integrate into the American experience; it chooses priority of American values over the Black ones. The other theory considers integration as impossible because America is not a homogeneous country to integrate into. Thus they speak in favor of group solidarity, ethnic independence and the "negritude." Historically, the African-American writer has always oscillated between these two aesthetic theories. Gates remarks that the African-American tradition, unlike almost every other, "was generated as a response to 18th and 19th c. allegations that persons of

African descent did not, could not, create literature” (Rivkin, Ryan, 2004, 987).

As an academic area African-American studies first emerged during the 1960s. Ethnicity and race appeared as an important new approach to literary study in the late 1960s and early 1970s in America. Writers of different ethnic minorities – African-Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, and Hispanic Americans – were concerned with the problem of representing the experiences and the lives of the “others”, those who had been marginalized. Writers of many literary genres reflected on the conditions of the life of ethnic American minorities in a society that was dominated by white supremacy. Those years witnessed the rise of previously “silent”, marginal groups characterized by racial, ethnic, gender, class differences as well as by sexual preferences. There are a few noticeable periods of African-American literary tradition: the early period (18th c.–early 1920s); the Harlem Renaissance (1920-1940); the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Arts (or Black Aesthetic) Movement of the 1960s and 1970s; a postmodern moment in African-American literature (roughly speaking, it started in the 1970s and continues to the present day). One more conspicuous trend within the body of African-American literature is African-American women’s literary tradition, the flowering of which in the 1970s and 1980s scholar and critic Joanne Braxton characterized as the “Afro-American renaissance” (Stein, 2009, 14).

### **Fugitive and Ex-Slave Narratives**

A study of African-American literature and culture should be started with the analysis of the African-American oral tradition (which includes work songs, rhymes, jokes and riddles, spirituals, blues, legends, folk tales, in which they reflected on their own circumstances as an enslaved group, the “call and response” of spiritual leaders) and slave narratives (autobiographies, recollections, memoirs) which had a considerable influence on its formation, and which “comprise one of the most influential traditions in African-American literature and culture, shaping the forms and themes of some of the most celebrated and controversial writing, in both autobiography and fiction, in the history of the US” (Gray, 2012, 126).

Narratives by fugitive slaves before the Civil War and by former slaves in the post-bellum era are essential to the study of all 18th and 19th c. American history and literature. Autobiography became a dominant literary genre in the 18th c. In the US, “narratives of the escaped slave” rose to prominence in the 3<sup>rd</sup> decade before the Civil War.

In defining the slave narrative, Gates claims that it grafted together the conventions of two separate literary traditions – the novel of sentiment

(confession) and the picaresque and became its own form (Spikes, 1997, 50). Another great influence upon the slave narrative, according to Gates, is the American romance, as like in other American romantic modes of narration, the language of the slave narrative is primarily an expression of the self, a conduit for particularly personal emotion (Spikes, 1997, 59). Thus the slave narrative as a literary genre combines elements of the novel of the sentiment, the picaresque, and the American romance. Generically the slave narrative can be linked to a variety of forms – from 17th c. captivity narratives and 18th c. autobiography to the domestic novel of the 19th c.

The general pattern of the slave narrative – an account of the life or a major part of the life, of a fugitive or former slave (written or orally related by the slave himself or herself) – documents of the slave's harsh conditions of life under slavery, the physical, psychological, moral, and spiritual damage that he suffered from white "Christian" slaveholders, his acquisition of literacy, a certain crisis (turning point) in his life and an eventual escape from the slavery and the South (restriction) to the freedom of the North (opportunity) which (a journey to the North), in the words of Gates, is a leitmotif in these texts of the "evolution of consciousness within the slave – from an identity as property and object to a sublime identity as human being and subject" (Spikes, 1997, 48). The vast majority of slave narratives' titles have the subtitle of "Written by Himself or Herself", as their authors felt authorship was important for their white readers of the mid-nineteenth c. Literacy and the ability of independent literary expression were powerful ways to dispel the main proslavery myth that slaves were incapable of mastering the arts of literacy. Also, in America of the middle of the 19th c. literacy was a sign of social prestige and economic power.

Many slave narratives have prefaces (sometimes appendices) and introductions by white amanuensis to prove that the black narrator has a good character and is reliable as well as to draw the reader's attention to what the narrator will reveal about the abominations of slavery, and very few 19th c. narratives have a preface by a person of African descent. However, in both cases the prefaces seek to confirm the veracity of the narratives that follow them. Despite their similar narrative features, the slave narratives have differences of the narrator's experience, geographical situation, public recognition etc.

Morrison claims that they range from the adventure-packed life of **Oloudah Equiano's** *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Oloudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself* (1782) to the quiet desperation of **Harriet Jacob's** (**Linda Brent's**) *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself* (1861); from the political savvy of **Frederick Douglass's** *Narrative of the Life of Frederick*

*Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* (1845) to the subtlety and modesty of **Henry Bibb's *Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, an American Slave, Written by Himself*** (1849) (Morrison, 2008, 65-66). A white Unitarian minister claimed that despite certain differences in slave narratives, the story that the formerly enslaved ones had to tell had a universal value – these were stories of human struggle, stories of enslavement that actually proved to be stories of the essential importance of freedom, and they were stories “calculated to exert a very wide influence on public opinion” (Graham, Ward, 2011, 95-6).

Three major groups of slave narratives can be singled out:

1. Tales of religious redemption;
2. Tales to inspire the abolitionist struggle;
3. Tales of progress.

From the 1770s to the 1820s, the slave narratives generally described a spiritual journey leading to Christian redemption. The authors usually characterized themselves as Africans rather than slaves, as most were born in Africa. These early slave narratives include accounts of brutality and deliverance, and, as a critic notes, the pervasive metaphor for all life-writing of this kind was the teleological journey – a purposeful trek from birth to death, which is ultimately redeemed spiritually and artistically by the guidance of Providence and the earthly agents of God. The masterpiece of early slave narratives, as well as the earliest slave narrative which received international attention, is the aforementioned *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Oloudah Equiano* which describes Equiano's simple, plain, and blissful life in his native land (Eden), his captivity, the terror of the Middle Passage and time spent in enslavement (the Fall), and recounts his attempts to become an independent man, his rising up from slavery, his learning to read, and his purchase of his freedom.

Finally, Equiano experiences a religious vision, and is “born again” to become one of “God's children” (Redemption). The narrator believes that all the good things of his life are due to the workings of divine Providence. Equiano's text established the form of the slave narrative and, indirectly or otherwise, it has influenced American writing and African-American writing in particular – to the present day. *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Oloudah Equiano* is “the first in a great tradition of American narratives that juxtapose the dream of freedom with the reality of oppression, the Edenic myth (...) with a history of fall and redemption” (Gray, 2012, 74).

From the mid-1820s, writers consciously chose the autobiographical form whose one purpose was to inspire the abolitionist movement by recounting their hardships under slavery and the atrocities of the

institution to a white audience. The two most exemplary autobiographical (slave) narratives of this type include **Frederick Douglass's (1817-1895) *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave, Written by Himself*** and **Harriet Jacob's (1813-1897)**

*Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself*. Douglass's – the most important 19th c. African-American writer - *Narrative*, which is recognized not only as the most influential of all slave narratives but also as “one of the classic texts of African American, American, and world literatures” (Cain, 2004, 1009), established him as one of the leading spokespeople for the abolitionist cause. Douglass's autobiography (mediated by white writers abolitionists – one wrote a preface, the other – a letter) belongs to the tradition of fugitive-slave narratives popular in the North before the Civil War. Douglass's autobiography follows the conventional narrative structure of most narratives written at the time: he provides a first-person account of his life spent in slavery, his learning to read and write a turning point in his life which strengthened his determination to escape from bondage. His arrival in the North and eventual success as an orator, is dedicated to a black liberation movement. We learn in the *Narrative* that while working for one of his white masters, Douglass finds the means necessary to be himself. The central moment in the *Narrative* is discovery. He recounts the cruelty of his master who submitted everyone to unrelenting work, starving and beating them, though he prayed and pretended to be devotional. Douglass recalls: “I was broken in body, soul, and spirit”; “the dark night of slavery closed in upon me, and behold a man transformed into a brute!” (Douglass, 1986, 35). But then came the turning point, an illumination which made him make up his mind to stand up for himself. Douglass reveals to the reader: “You have seen how a man was made a slave, you shall see how a slave was made a man” (Douglass, 1986, 47). The narrator remembers the time when his master tried to beat him and he resisted and describes this battle as “the turning point in my career as a slave” (Douglass, 1986, 54). It was the moment when Douglass was ready to express his selfhood, his sense of his own worth and dignity at the expense of his life if necessary. The incident, as he admits, revived within him a sense of his own manhood, and the departed self-confidence as well as a determination to be free. Douglass's recovery of **selfhood** is described as his spiritual rebirth. After this Douglass spends four more years in slavery and tells the reader about the ways the brutal and hypocritical slave system dehumanizes not only the slave but also the master. Douglass's text is not only historical – it also has a literary value as he shapes his characters and circumstances to communicate his ideas about slavery. His other important works include *The Heroic Slave* (1853), which is considered the first novella in African American literature; *My Bondage*

and *My Freedom* (1855); and *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1881).

An abolitionist speaker and reformer **Harriet Jacobs'** autobiography *Incidents* which was written under the pseudonym of Linda Brent (the book was edited by Maria Child) gives her the reputation of the first woman to author a fugitive slave narrative in the US. Jacobs states at the beginning of her own book: "I was born a slave" – a classic opening of slave narrative. She continues, however, in a different vein: "but I never knew it till six years of happy childhood had passed away." Jacobs (Linda Brent), a former slave and a fugitive, recounts her comfortable life in a "comfortable home" where she lived together with her parents and a brother, as her father was allowed to have his own trade though they were all slaves - the thing she found out after her parents' death and had to go not only through the general hardships of slavery, but also suffer sexual abuse of her white master.

One of the central themes of *Incidents* is betrayal of different kinds. Betrayal was the experience of Jacobs' great-grandmother and grandmother who, when freed, were captured and sold back into slavery, Jacobs' dying mother was betrayed when her white mistress promised to set all her children free but did not keep her promise. Jacob's *Incidents* is not that different from Douglass's *Narrative*. And yet there are differences in the general meaning and tone of the two works. In *Incidents* there is more emphasis on family ties, blood relationships within the black community, than there is in the Douglass story. In addressing the reader, for example, there is more appeal to sentiment, to the reader's sympathy than to some abstract principles or feelings of anger. In *Incidents* women play a more important role than men: heroic women, like Jacobs' family women and evil women who betray promises. The tale focuses on the female experience of slavery and thus uses the techniques of the sentimental novel as well as those of the slave narrative. And, in the words of one critic, at the center of the narrative is "that familiar protagonist of sentimental fiction: the young woman affronting her destiny – and, in due time, faced with a dangerous seducer (she became the object of her white master's sexual pursuit and to escape it, she became the lover of another white man and bore him two children – D.M.) The female orphan making her way in the world" (Gray, 2012, 132). In the episode of escape, Jacobs did not flee to the North (as Douglass did). Instead, as she confesses to the reader, she hid in a small attic of her grandmother's house for seven years to be close to her children who lived there (she watched them through a hole she had made). Thus unlike Douglass, Jacobs achieves personal freedom not in lonely flight, heroic battle, or recovering manhood, but in being with her family, even if in separation from them. However, after seven years in hiding she finally fled to the North where she was reunited with her

children and had their freedom bought. In recounting her sexual affairs as a slave woman, making a kind of confession and justifying herself, Jacobs shows that black female slaves could not conform to the traditional ideals of the “**Cult of True Womanhood**” (piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity) proclaimed in the antebellum decades of the 19th c. as they had been robbed of the traditional roles of woman, mother and wife. However, in William L. Andrews’s words, “Harriet Jacobs turned her autobiography into a unique analysis of the myths and the realities that defined the situation of the African-American woman and her relationship to 19th c. standards of womanhood. As a result, “Incidents” occupies a crucial place in the history of American women’s literature in general and African-American women’s literature in particular” (Andrews, 1997, 889).

Other significant narratives of the period include a memoir and a slave narrative *Twelve Years a Slave, Narrative of Solomon Northup, 1853*; *The Life of Josiah Henson, Formerly a Slave, Now an Inhabitant of Canada, as Narrated by Himself, 1849* – a slave narrative written by Josiah Henson, who later became famous for being the basis of the character of Tom from Harriet Beecher Stowe’s novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, 1852; a slave narrative *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave, by Mary Prince, 1831* – the first account of the life of a black woman which was published in the United Kingdom where she was living at the time.

After the defeat of the slave states of the Confederate South (the end of Civil War in 1865), the authors had less need to show the horrors of slavery and gave accounts of the narrator’s adjustment to the new life of freedom. The writers focused on the story of individual and racial progress rather than that of securing freedom. This period in African-American autobiographical literature is best represented by **Booker T. Washington (1856-1915)** – the founder of Tuskege Institute a thinker, educator, and the most prominent black leader of his day who succeeded Frederick Douglass as the chief African- American spokesperson. He became prominent for his attempts to improve the lives of recently freed ;black Americans by involving them in the mainstream of American society (this policy was outlined in his famous speech at the Atlanta Exposition in 1895).

Washington is considered one of the most controversial of race leaders because of his often “accommodationist stance.” In contrast to his famous contemporary African American sociologist, historian and civil rights activist W.E.B. Du Bois, who had a more confrontational attitude toward ending racial strife in America, Washington believed that Blacks should first prove themselves the equals of whites before asking for an end to racism.

Washington's most significant published work is his autobiography *Up from Slavery* (1901) which is partly a slave narrative and partly a collection of speeches he had made in the years after the founding of Tuskegee Institute. The work gives an account of more than forty years of his life: from slave to schoolmaster to the face of southern race relations. The word "Up" in the title emphasizes Washington's firm belief that African Americans can move upward if they use advantage of the opportunities offered to them and work hard to achieve a place of substance in the world. As with many slave narratives or life stories, there are accounts of the hardships of slavery, barrenness and desolation of the slave experience. However, what is unusual about Washington's account is that there are no any negative feelings about the institution of slavery or those who supported it. He does admit that slaves wanted freedom: "I have never seen one who did not want to be free, or one who would return to slavery." However, unlike the authors of other slave narratives who saw slavery as hell (especially Douglass), Washington tended to emphasize its educative role. Slavery, according to him, was that "school" which helped prepare African Americans for the role they had to assume after the Civil War. He claims that "thanks to the school of American slavery Negroes...are in a stronger and more hopeful condition, materially, intellectually, morally, and religiously, than is true of an equal number of black people in any other portion of the globe." James Robinson notes in his Introduction to Washington's autobiography that, "throughout the entire book, (Washington) is conciliatory and forgiving toward southern whites and their system of racism and oppression" (Gray, 2012, 176). On the other hand, Washington stresses the big importance of education for blacks in achieving success. He describes his efforts to instill manners, breeding, health and a feeling of dignity to students. His educational policy emphasizes combining academic subjects with learning a trade. In this text, Washington achieves social and financial success through hard, manual labor, a good education, and his relationships with great people. The narrative is modeled on the archetypal American success story: a man (Washington) rises to prominence through his hard work, thrift, diligence and then reveals the secret of his success to his reader to enable him to rise as well. Washington's book *Up from Slavery* was a bestseller, and in 1998 the Modern Library listed the book at number 3 on its list of the 100 best nonfiction books of the 20th c.

Other works of note which fall into the category of post-bellum "Tales of Progress" are *The Underground Railroad Records by William Still* (1872) who is known as the Father of the Underground Railroad. Still carefully compiled and recounted the stories and methods of those who he had helped escape to freedom via the Underground Railroad and included them into the book. One of the few post-Emancipation published slave narratives is *From the Darkness Cometh the Light, by*

*Lucy Delaney, 1892*, which is the first-person account of a successful “freedom suit.”

This early period of the African-American literary tradition can be characterized as the advancement of the “integrationist” theory of art. It can be argued, however, that this “integration” was controversial as it had two aspects: **positive and negative**. As has been explored above, the aims of the authors of slave narratives were to render their personal experience of being a slave, to give an account of the dehumanizing nature of the institution of slavery in the hope of reaching the hearts and minds of white readership, to show that Black slaves were also human beings capable for perfection; by writing they asserted equality. The negative aspect of the “integrationist” theory was that a number of African- American authors who wrote in other literary genres sought assimilation. And to be able to assimilate the Black writer had either to make his Black characters “less black” or to depict Black people as whites wanted to see them. Some of the writers of the period (L. Dunbar, C.W. Chestnut, and J.W. Johnson) reinforced the stereotypes of the “nigger”: the contented slave or the comic Negro, the exotic primitive who does not question his inferior status, or the brute. The character of the “tragic mulatto” was the result of his wish to imitate whiteness, or “to pass”; his tragedy also lay in the fact that he could not completely fit in the white society or the black society and was equally scorned by both.

### **Tutor Marked Assignment**

1. What were the reasons for writing slave narratives? What were their settings?  
And who were the authors?
2. Why was it important for white readers of the mid-nineteenth to see the “Written by Himself or Herself” subtitle in these narratives?
3. What is the significance of the prefaces and introductions found in many?
4. Slave narratives?

### **Harlem Renaissance or, the New Negro Movement**

The **Harlem Renaissance** was a cultural, social, and artistic explosion, a flowering in African-American life, and African-American intellectual reawakening in the 1920s which began in the New York district of Harlem and ended with the Great Depression in the early 1930s, though many of its ideas lived on much longer. Although the movement of Harlem Renaissance included numerous Black social thinkers, artists, jazz and blues musicians, it is best known for its literary production. Broadly speaking, the Harlem Renaissance was regarded to be a rebirth

of African-American arts. *Webster's New World Dictionary* defines a "renaissance" as a "rebirth" or "revival." However, some historians and critics believe that what took place during the years of Harlem Renaissance was not a rebirth, as such, but only another stage in the evolution of African and African-American art that had begun with the inception of African presence in America (Bernard, 2011, 269). Among representatives of the movement there was a growing sense that black America was on the verge of a second Emancipation which would be the result of the will and achievements of artists and intellectuals.

The Harlem Renaissance was inspired by the **Great Migration**. At the turn of the 20th c. African-Americans faced many factors that made them leave the South and move toward the North. These factors included great racist violence, suppression, natural disasters, and very few job opportunities. Migration from the American South to such big Northern urban cities as Chicago, Detroit, Philadelphia, or Washington DC opened up new economic opportunities, especially when at the outset of World War I in 1917, many white men left their jobs and joined the armed forces. The North was also the place which offered more cultural possibilities for those "who wanted to make the African-American voice heard" (Gray, 2012, 476).

The Harlem Renaissance was also closely associated with the **New Negro Movement** which was as much concerned with the creation of a fresh American identity as it was with the demise of the old (Bernard, 2011, 268).

The New Negro Movement was an effort to define what it meant to be African-American by African-Americans themselves. A crucially important event in African-American literature at the beginning of Harlem Renaissance years was the publication of *The New Negro* established and edited by **Alain Locke** in 1925 (alongside with others, for example, V.F. Calverton's *An Anthology of American Negro Literature*). Its contributors included men and women, black and white people of all generations. This collection of literary works – fiction, poetry, drama by African-Americans, essays on African-American art and literature alongside broader social issues advocated, as Locke called it "a spiritual coming of age", sought to declare the growth of a "common consciousness" among African-Americans and to show that "the American mind must reckon with a fundamentally changed Negro" (Gray, 2012, 477), as well as described a new sense of racial pride, personal and racial selfhood, and claimed that black is beautiful.

Then how was the "**Old Negro**" characterized? For example, as the writer A. Phillip Randolph explained, the "Old Negro" included "political conservatism, accommodationist politics, opposition to

organized labor, and dependence upon white benefactors who had nothing but disdain for the working class,” and they “stood in the way of racial progress (...) because of their involvement with the “Old crowd of White Americans – a group which viciously opposes every demand made by organized labor for an opportunity to live a better life” (Bernard, 2011, 273). One such, as Randolph pointed out, was an essayist, a novelist, and a political leader W.E.B. DuBois. For Locke, the “Old Negroes” were sambos, pickaninnies, bucks, mammies, Uncle Toms – stock figures that dominated the cultural landscape of the American South in broadsides, advertisements and minstrel shows (Bernard, 2011, 274).

The Harlem Renaissance tried to reject the notion of the “Old Negro” and his self-hatred. Negative images of black people were being replaced by the positive ones.

The New Negro Movement sparked off debates about the relationship between race and art. And notwithstanding the fact that the Black artists shared many ideas about the transforming power and future of the “New Negro” and his role in the advancement of African-Americans’ social and cultural life, they adopted different stances on this point. For instance, **Langston Hughes** was one of those Harlem Renaissance writers who affirmed the notion of a purely black identity and claimed that black American experience lay in a direct line to the Motherhood (Africa); whereas writers as **Countee Cullen** and **Jean Toomer** questioned the term “black writer” itself, as they did not affirm the concept of a black identity as such. And indeed, what could Africa mean for African- Americans with mixed ancestries and bloodlines or for those who had no direct experience of it and for whom Africa was only an abstraction, and blackness – a puzzle? They envisioned an American identity that would transcend race. Thus some Harlem Renaissance authors claimed that a Black writer’s work should be restricted to his black identity and black experience, whereas others attempted to rise above their race and embrace more universal aspects of human existence.

Among the most prominent writers of the period were a poet, novelist and short story writer **Claude McKay**, **Langston Hughes**, who worked in a great variety of genres, poet **Countee Cullen**, fiction writers **Zora Neal Hurston** and **Nella Larsen**, fiction writer and poet **Jean Toomer**. In their work they reconsidered Black history and Black identity, explored Black folklore, the dialect forms of language, oral tradition. They attempted to explore the theme of Black experience using a new – modernist experimental and novel – artistic form (modernism was a dominant trend in literature and the arts both in America and Europe in the first decades of the 20th c).

Folklorist, playwright, anthropologist, and novelist **Zora Neale Hurston (1903-1960)** is considered an early feminist, a forerunner of African-American women's movement who inspired and influenced such contemporary African-American writers as Alice Walker and Toni Morrison, especially through her autobiography *Dust Tracks on the Road* (1942). In her works Hurston was trying to make the point that a human being creates and defines himself through his art of speaking. In other words, she was convinced that individuals and communities "voice themselves into being, that they achieve identity and continuity through the telling of themselves" (Gray, 2012, 481).

Hurston's masterpiece novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) is a depiction of a beautiful mulatto woman's maturation, - discovery of her true identity. Her aim in this book (and in her other works) was to revise and adapt vernacular forms to give voice to women: to create a genuinely democratic oral culture, or, as she put it, "words walking without masters" (Gray, 2012, 481), as she had noticed that African-American women in particular were denied access to the pulpit and porch – the privileged sites of storytelling – and hence the chance of self-definition. The central character of the novel Janie Crawford concludes: "Two things everybody's got tuh do for theyselves, they got tuh go tuh God, and they got tuh find out about livin' fuh theyselves" (Hurston, 1991, 34).

The irony is that she has to win the right to see and speak about living for herself. Janie has to resist the humiliating stereotypes and definitions imposed on her by society as a black person and a woman. She has to disobey the order of one of her husbands not to engage in "porch talk." What Janie has to do is to claim her own voice, and in the process her own self and rightful place in the vocal community. Her grandmother Nancy, an ex-slave, tells her that "De nigger woman is de mule uh de world so fur as Ah can see" (Hurston, 1991, 56). However, being dignified, Janie does not give up her desire to realize herself through two, though loveless, marriages. She finally finds love and joy in her third marriage as well as the opportunity to be her own self and to speak for herself. And although the marriage ends tragically – her husband dies a violent death, Janie is an already changed, singular, and mature woman who can participate in the "porch talk" of the community. She has found her true speech and thus her true self. Hurston's other works of importance include the novel *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (1934) in which the main character – a poet and a preacher – establishes his identity through art; a collection of African-American folk tales, songs, games, and hoodoo practices *Mules and Men* (1935).

African-American culture contributed greatly to the rise of jazz in the 1920s, what came to be called the **Jazz Age**, or the **"Roaring**

**Twenties.”** Alongside with the extreme popularity of jazz music, the Jazz age was marked by a glamorous life-style, the New York nightlife dominated by cabarets, buffet flats, ballrooms, speakeasies, nightclubs which presented such black performers as John Coltrane, Duke Ellington, Billie Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald, Bessie Smith, and others. Many Harlem Renaissance writers and artists were greatly influenced by jazz music (as well as blues) and employed elements of jazz in their work. One of the many talented writers of the Harlem Renaissance was **Langston Hughes (1902-1967)**. He was versatile and worked in many literary genres – poetry, fiction, drama, autobiography, and the essay. But it was his poetry that left an indelible mark in the African-American literature of the period. Hughes’s collections of poems *The Weary Blues* (1926), *Fine Clothes to the Jew* (1927), *Harlem* (1942), *Montage of a Dream Deferred* (1951), and *Ask Your Mama* (1961) reveal his deeply-felt commitment to the idea of a separate and distinctive black identity that he spoke about in his influential essay *The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain* (1926). In the essay he wrote: “To my mind, it is the duty of the young Negro artist to change through the force of his art that old whispering ‘I want to be white’ hidden in the aspirations of his people, to ‘Why should I want to be white? I am a Negro – and beautiful” (Hughes, 1999, 1025). Hughes explained that this does not mean that the black writer should simply idealize black life. “We know we are beautiful and ugly too,” he observed. What he meant was that black writers’ should uncover the rich heritage – the power and glory – of African-American traditions. In his attempt to embrace the multiple layers, the pace, and diversity of African-American life, the poet speaks through multiple voices, for example, through the voice of a young schoolchild in “Theme for English B,” a dying man in “Sylvester’s Dying Bed,” or a smart and sassy older woman in “Madam’s Past History.” Hughes was a socially committed poet and always stressed his devotion to black community and culture.

In many of his poems, Hughes employs elements of African-American jazz music, blues, spirituals, folklore, and colloquial speech. Hughes admitted that many of his poems had a racial theme, and in many of them he tried to grasp and hold some of the meanings and rhythms of jazz. Hughes believed that the essence of jazz was that it was improvisational, subversive, and open-ended and therefore challenged the closed structures of the dominant white culture (Gray, 2012, 489). Hughes argued that jazz was a heartbeat, “this heartbeat is yours.” Jazz, as he saw it, was a vast sea “that washes up all kinds of fish and shells and spume with a steady old beat, or off-beat.” And by the sea he must have meant the source of African American oral cultural traditions - spirituals, work songs, field hollers, and shouts as well as the source of blues, ragtime, gospel, and rock and roll that helped release a myriad of feelings and emotions: joy, sorrow, pain, nostalgia, and suffering. Jazz

for Hughes was also an act of rebellion. Some of the author's best poems in which he incorporates rhythms, themes, and vocabulary of jazz and blues include "Seven Moments in Love," "Still Here," "The Weary Blues," "The Cat and the Saxophone," "Montage of a Dream Deferred." The complex dilemma that Hughes presents in his essay *The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain*, is about whether one is a poet or a Negro poet, that is, whether race is an essential feature or a social construct of a black writer's identity. How big is the difference between American and African-American? This dilemma continues to exist in our own time and is reflected on in the works of many contemporary African-American writers. However, the Harlem Renaissance was still partly based on the "integrationist" premises as the publication of the work by black authors largely depended on the taste and priorities of white publishing-houses. The artists and intellectuals of Harlem Renaissance had faith in the future of the "New Negro," they believed in democratic reforms and in the power of art and literature to effect these changes. However, Harlem Renaissance ended with the start of the Great Depression in the early 1930s, which questioned the importance and centrality of culture, unrelated to economic and social realities.

### Tutor Marked Assignment

1. What were the reasons for the emergence of Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s?
2. Comment on the literary and cultural scene of Harlem Renaissance. What ideas did the writers and artists share and how did their opinions differ? (Consider their attitude to the role of the black writer in relation to his art).
3. Why was the Harlem Renaissance called the "New Negro" movement?
4. What caused the end of Harlem Renaissance and why?

### The Civil Rights Era and the Black Arts Movement (Black Aesthetic) (1960s-1970s)

The 1960s can be considered a turning point in American social, political, and cultural life. The emergence of counterculture, anti-war movements, the movement of ethnic minorities, women's liberation movement, the Feminist revolution, the Civil Rights Movement, which caused widespread civil unrest in the country, the assassinations of president John Kennedy, civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr. and a civil rights activist Malcolm X, made Americans reconsider sets of values they had adhered to before. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, African-American poets, literary critics, and theorists produced a large body of works which reflected the spirit of **Black Power** self-determination and African-American expressive culture. Two seminal

books *Black Fire: An Anthology of Afro-American Writing* (1968) and *The Black Aesthetic* (1971) were published which included the work of creative artists and intellectuals who committed themselves to producing artistic and cultural works to black audiences. The former work had an especially powerful effect upon the black audience when it was released in 1968, as the contributors in the collection seemed to embody the spirit of rebellion and revolution all over the country when black people rioted in response to the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968. The anthology illustrates the idea of the Black experience revitalized in the powers of Soul, which dissolves the boundaries between art and life (Morrison, 2008, 54). **Negritude and Soul** reflect a special concept of African-American spiritual condition, the ever changing state of art and soul, the rejection of the Western dichotomies of reason vs. heart, concrete vs. abstract, action vs. thinking, individual vs. group etc. Some literary works published in the two anthologies had a racist, militant, and nationalistic character. For instance, Marvin X (Marvin E. Jackmon) ends his poem "That Old Time Religion" with the line "LET THERE BE BLACKNESS OVER THIS LAND LET BLACK POWER SHINE AND SHINE." Another author addresses a white authority figure by saying "Man, your whole history / Ain't been nothing but a hustle." And Imamu Amiri Baraka (LeRoy Jones), who was considered Father of the Black Arts Movement, wrote: "The black man is the future of the world," "Let black people understand that / they are the lovers and the sons of lovers and warriors and sons of warriors." In a poem called "Black Art," he says: "we are black magicians, black art / & we make in black labs of the heart /.../ ... we own / the night." (Gray, 2012, 641). These nationalist and confrontational statements as well as an emphasis on the superiority of blackness, black pride and black aesthetic, were characteristic of many African-American writings during the 1960s and 1970s. The bulk of this kind of writing is permeated with race pride. The contributors of the two anthologies included such prominent Black Arts era figures as **Amiri Baraka (LeRoy Jones)**, **Sonia Sanchez**, **Ed Bullins**, **Don L. Lee (Haki Madhubuti)**, **Gwendolyn Brooks**, and others. The essence of the works included into the two anthologies was defined as the Black Arts Movement. The origins of the Black Arts Movement and Black Aesthetic discourses are multifaceted and deeply rooted in African-American political and literary thought (Smethurst, Rambsy, 2011, 406). Artists of the New Negro Movement of the 1920s and later generations of black writers produced literary works that stressed Black nationalism and critiques of white racism. Yet, the terms the "Black Arts Movement," "Black Arts," "Black Aesthetic" emerged due to the aforementioned events that took place in the middle of the 1960s. The majority of artists of the Black Arts Movement claimed the specificity of African-American art, suggested aesthetic separatism, advocated a nationalistic approach to literature, viewed art as a weapon, and had intentions to withdraw from the dialogue with White society.

The artists of the Civil Rights Movement period **Richard Wright (1908- 1960)**, **James Baldwin (1924-1987)**, **Ralph Ellison (1914-1994)** try to balance between the demands of being a Black writer and various tensions. They present “Black material,” however, at the same time they tend to move away from racial focus in literature and try to stress the universal human experience, pointing out the fact that an artist can reveal, or at least attempt to reveal the experience of all people. Wright’s *Native Son* (1940) and Ellison’s *Invisible Man* (1952) enriched the African-American literary tradition with philosophical existential depth. Their work highlight themes of a black man’s alienation, discrimination and humiliation in white society, however, at the very center of their fiction is a character’s loss of identity and his desperate attempts to discover his true self, and in case of failing to do that, at least “invent” himself. In his two autobiographical books *Black Boy* (1945) and *American Hunger* (1977), **Wright** traces his life from childhood in his native South to adulthood in the North, - a journey in search for identity. For Wright, identity was a social and cultural construct, not natural: it had to be won, struggled, and suffered for. He believes that all African-Americans had been denied a similar knowledge. In *Black Boy* he speaks about “the cultural barrenness of black people,” “the essential bleakness of black life in .America,” as, according to him, “Negroes had never been allowed to catch the full spirit of Western civilization.” Wright claims that the most severe blow they received from white society was their exclusion from a sense of fully being in the world. However, the author believed that he had made himself. He realized his blackness, his belonging to the black race when at the same time he managed to go beyond the restrictions of race. *Black Boy* and *American Hunger*, constitute one of the great retellings of the American myth of personal reinvention, the making of an identity” (Gray, 2012, 500-1).

**Wright’s** most important book was the novel **Native Son**. The protagonist of the novel – an uneducated black youth – mistakenly kills his white master’s daughter, burns her body, and murders his black girlfriend, fearing she will betray him. Fear is the emotional condition of the character’s life. This second act is seen as the product not of will, but of circumstance and the violence it engenders. Waiting in prison for his trial, the protagonist feels free for the first time in his life as, he believes, he has broken out of the prison of himself. He finally comes to realize his emotional state as well as his motives, reasons for his violence, and arrives at the conclusion that “what I killed for, I am!” Thus he realizes his true essence and identity.

In Wright’s later works, there are noticeable traces of existentialism, for instance, in the novel *The Outsider* (1953) which centers on a young black intellectual’s search for identity. In his later nonfiction works (*Black Power* 1954, *White Man Listen!* 1957), there is a move toward **Black Nationalism**. The writers of Black Aesthetic of the 1960s

considered him their forerunner, as they saw his militancy and the willingness to use art as a weapon. Wright argued, however, that although black writers' mission was to influence "human affairs" with their art, writing had a certain professional autonomy. He was convinced that if a literary work is too didactic, "the artistic sense is submerged." For him, literature was coextensive with life, but they were not to be confused with each other. Every first rate novel, poem, or play "lifts the level of consciousness higher." Thus, according to him, imaginative writing was a vital agent of awareness and luminous revelation of change – an enabler of life (Gray, 2012, 502-3). **Baldwin**, too, dealt with issues of race in his work, explored the theme of African-American identity, - many of his characters oscillate between the necessity to integrate themselves in the mainstream of American society, accept White standards of living and thus gain recognition, and a sense of security and being their own selves. Baldwin's major concern, however, was about sexuality. In many of his stories and essays he examined what it meant to be both Black and homosexual at a time when neither was accepted by American culture. Baldwin's best known work is the autobiographical novel *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953) about a youth who seeks self-knowledge and religious faith. His other important works include *Another Country* (1962) which centers on racial issues and homosexuality, and *Nobody Knows my Name* (1961) – a collection of personal essays about racism, the role of the artist, and literature.

In the genre of prose, **Ellison's** only novel *Invisible Man*<sup>6</sup> was a highly original and important event in the history of African-American literature since World War II. The main theme of the work is the black protagonist's search for identity and individuality both as an African-American and a human being. It is an account of a young black's awakening to racial discrimination and his battle against the refusal of white Americans to see him apart from his ethnic background, which in turn leads to his humiliation and disillusionment. The novel is set in the 1930s and describes the experiences of its anonymous protagonist (who is also the narrator) as he travels through America in search of his identity trying to cope with the dilemma that Ellison summed up in one of his essays: "the nature of our society is such that we are prevented from knowing who we are" (Gray, 2012, 652). The main metaphor of the novel is human invisibility. First, white society ignores the individuality and humanity of the blacks and views them as stereotypes. They are exploited and their needs are disregarded. Thus black Americans become invisible. Secondly, the protagonist is white oriented and feels inferior and ashamed of his dark skin color. Thus he is part of the crowd of people who comply with the rules and customs prescribed by white society. All throughout the novel, the Invisible Man forms his life according to other people's life models, imitates them and refuses to question his own choices and preferences. Therefore, he ignores his own

responsibility in his development and acknowledgment as a visible man. The novel also reflects upon the socio-historical factors of life in the middle of the 20th c. America. It shows all the cruelties, humiliation and injustice that a black man had to face in white society. Believing that “white is right,” and black is unimportant, the protagonist does not see the extent of his invisibility and authenticity until the end of the novel. He is constantly betrayed by all people who he trusted, and finally he realizes that he has to distance himself from other people in order to see and understand himself. In this way he searches for a solution. The protagonist understands that he himself is responsible for his identity and acknowledgement by other people.

*Invisible Man* has features of postmodern novel with regard to the main theme, - the protagonist is not only African-American, he is also a universal human being melted and assimilated in a consumer society which obliterates all individuality of a person. The novel is also an example of a Bildungsroman in that it is a character's journey to self-understanding and selfhood. Viewed in this context, the author seems to emphasize the idea that individual should find the strength to resist the oppressive power of (modern / postmodern) civilization. In Ellison's view, if individual accepts the norms and opinions imposed on him, if he fears to be different from the mob and allows others to rule his life, he has no chance to become a genuine and visible personality.

### **Tutor- Marked Assignment**

- I. Discuss the ideas of Existentialism in Richard Wright's novel *Native Son*.
2. What event prompts the narrator to write to his brother?
3. What does the narrator's mother ask him to do for Sonny? Does the older brother keep his promise?
4. The major characters in this story are called Mama, Daddy and Sonny (the older brother is never named or even nicknamed). How do these names affect our sense of the story?

### The Post-Modern Turn in African-American Literature and Neo-Slave Narratives

In 1970 there was a burst of literary activity in African-American literature: twenty-five novels, major dramatic works, and volumes of poetry were released. This event has been called by some critics the beginning of the second renaissance of black women's writing, whereas others consider this moment as the emergence of black literary postmodernism (Dubey, Goldberg, 2011, 569). **Black postmodern literature** shares many features common to all postmodernism(s), – it is characterized as self-conscious, self-reflexive, and it first of all aims to revise history, identity, and aesthetics.

One of the aims of postmodern African-American literature is to “provoke critical self-reflection about the demands for racial representation that have been historically been placed on black writers” (Dubey, Goldberg, 2011, 569). From its beginnings in the 19th c. slave narratives and all black literature has been expected to realistically depict the race – African-Americans – and speak about their experience as a whole.

**Postmodern African-American writers** self-consciously revise the dominant traditional literary forms of racial representation by parodying these forms and revealing them to be textual constructs, and not true-to-life reflections of black life. Since the 1970s, there has been a growing interest in the historical past as well as the implications of this past for Post-Civil Rights explorations of black identity. It should be noted that it was the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s that introduced a cultural redefinition of blackness that was in part responsible for the literary innovations of postmodern African-American authors. However, these authors also rejected Black Arts ideals of racial identity and community. Literary and cultural critics broadly agree that postmodernism in the African-American context is “defined by a heightened attention to the intra-racial differences (of class, gender, and sexuality) that had been suppressed in black cultural nationalist discourse” (Dubey, Goldberg, 2011, 566).

As far as **dominant postmodern paradigms of identity and aesthetics** are concerned, a number of innovative formal strategies were used in an attempt to represent a post-1970s **black “poly consciousness”** in literature. These formal strategies include **textual fragmentation** (which reveals a character's split consciousness, or, poly consciousness, his fragmentary mind), **linguistic bricolage**, and the **transgression of generic and cultural boundaries**. Postmodernism questions the idea of objectivity and “objective truth,” especially historical truth. How do we know what is fact and what is fiction? Postmodern writers working in the genre of the novel revise significant points of history by critically

rewriting traditional narrative forms, especially slave narratives and narratives of migration. They often use parody to show the unreliability of the official historical account of slavery. Such novels are referred to as works of **historiographical meta-fiction** (a genre of postmodern novel) – the literary theorist and critic Linda Hutcheon’s term for postmodern novels concerned with history.

**Historiographical meta-fiction** raises the question “How do we know the past?” and acknowledges the need to question the received versions of history. It does not seek to tell the truth but considers the question of whose truth gets told. It questions the authority and objectivity of historical sources and explanations. In postmodernism, both history and fiction are treated as cultural sign systems, ideological constructions. Historiographical meta-fiction reflects the postmodern view that we can know “reality” only as it is produced and sustained by cultural representations of it (Hutcheon, 1998, 123).

In the 1960s the historical archive of slavery expanded, and this inspired the literary works of realist historical novels of slavery that drew on oral tradition as a “way of recovering the subjective experience of slaves” (Dubey, Goldberg, 2001, 598). The first African-American novel which dealt with the return to the historical moment of slavery was **Margaret Walker’s *Jubilee* (1966)** - a literary adaptation of her great-grandmother’s oral tales of slavery. From the 1970s onward there have been several major texts of the slave narrative told from the first or third person point of view of the slave himself or herself, for instance, **Barbara Chase-Riboud’s *Sally Hemings* (1979)** about Thomas Jefferson’s longtime slave mistress, with whom he had several children; **Alex Haley’s *Roots* (1976)**; **Anne William’s *Dessa Rose* (1986)**. Contrary to the aforementioned novels, most **neo-slave narratives** experiment with narrative form and voice to examine the legacy of slavery which continues into the 20th c. As an example, one can mention **Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987)**, which tells the story of escaped slave Margaret Garner. Here the author employs postmodern techniques such as fragmentation of linear time to piece together traumatic memory, what Morrison’s characters call “re-memory.” The novel’s concern with temporality is a “striking manifestation of the specifically African American expression of postmodernism” (Dubey, Goldberg, 2011, 599).

Other novels that illustrate this particular approach to time and trauma include **Gayl Jones’s *Corregidora* (1975)** and **Octavia Butler’s *Kindred* (1979)** which is considered the postmodern slave narrative in her use of time-travel device. Timothy Spaulding defines the postmodern slave narrative as “that proliferating sub-genre of late

twentieth-century novels of slavery that violate the conventions of narrative realism.” He goes on to explain that “the break from realism in recent narratives of slavery disrupts the governing protocols of historical representation, in particular calling into question the positivist truth-claims of modern historiography” (Spaulding, 2005, 18-19). A number of African-American writers in post-1952 fictional creation, like the ones before them, look to the South for its imaginative inspiration. And this kind of fictional creation has been called the neo-slave narrative, a term first coined by Bernard Bell.

**Ashraf Rushdy’s** book *Neo-Slave Narratives: Studies in the Social Logic of a Literary Form* (1999) provides the most comprehensive study of the genre to date. Rushdy defines the neo-slave narrative as that body of “contemporary novels that assume the form, adopt the conventions, and take on the first-person voice of the ante-bellum slave narrative.” For some authors, slavery serves as a textual layer to their fiction, whereas for others, slavery is the incentive for their literary creations. Trudier Harris divides **neo-slave narratives** into **four categories** (Harris, 2011, 475): the texts by women writers for whom slavery serves as the center of their narratives as they represent their female characters (Margaret Walker’s *Jubilee* (1966), Sherley Anne Williams’ *Dessa Rose* (1986), Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987), J. California Cooper’s *Family* (1991). In these texts, the experiences of the characters are contemporary with the chronology of slavery and its immediate aftermath.

In the second category, characters in the 20th c. find themselves haunted by and / or experiencing the conditions of slavery (Gayl Jones’s *Corregidora* (1975), Octavia Butler’s *Kindred* (1979), David Bradley’s *The Chaneysville Incident* (1981), and Phyllis Alesia Perry’s *Stigmata* (1998). In the third category, slavery is the subject of satire (Ishmael Reed’s *Flight to Canada* (1976), Charles Johnson’s *Middle Passage* (1990). The writers of neo-slave narratives, in which the characters experience slavery directly and chronologically with it, reveal new aspects of the condition of slaves (during or after the slavery), of the relationships between black slaves and their masters, between a black female slave and her white master and a white mistress, and between the blacks themselves. Some authors of these neo-slave narratives show instances of black slaves’ heroic resilience and defiance against their white masters; mutual sexual desire of persons who could be attracted to each other in spite of race, class, or previous condition of servitude; the possibility of black female slave’s friendship with a white woman; the jealousy that existed between white women and attractive black women on plantations as well as the black woman’s jealousy towards the white woman who becomes the mistress of the black man she loves. As it has been noted, another feature of neo-slave narratives is depicting

characters in the 20th c. who are returned back into slavery or who are so haunted by it that they have difficulty living healthy lives in the 20th c. The family histories of characters in each of these texts are different, and each character haunted by the memories of the historical past (by the memories of the lives of his / her ancestors), has to find his or her own way to shake off the burden of the past in order to live at peace.

**Jones's *Corregidora*** could serve here as an example. The main character Ursa Corregidora is locked into memories of slavery because of mother love. Both her grandmother and great-grandmother were raped by the same Brazilian slaveholder Corregidora who then turned them into prostitutes. He observed no morality that could prevent him from having sex with his daughters and granddaughters, so he burned family records in order to erase his immoral actions. To counter that erasure, the women vowed to give birth to daughters and to pass on the narrative to their daughters; and thus the story has come down to Ursa. Her family history in slavery and after it is a heavy burden to Ursa, who can hardly imagine what life will be like when she is made barren after being pushed down a flight of stairs. In this narrative, the past always intrudes into the present and oppresses her psychologically, though she cannot identify the reason. Remembering the past is praiseworthy, it should heal a person, but the past here features only a violent white male ancestor. Thus here memory is not a healing power, for it has an aura of vengeance, and not self-revelation or self-improvement. Memory imprisons Ursa more than it frees her, she is tied to a static history rather than to a dynamic one. Thus Ursa is challenged to put the past into perspective, to recognize that her own body cannot continue to be the instrument for retaining negative historical memory, that she, as an individual, has a right to move forward no matter how horribly her ancestors were treated. Ursa must find a way to cope with the past, with the memories without them destroying her future. She must find another means of procreation. Also, she must put the past in perspective and push aside the weight of the past and make space for herself instead of living her life for her ancestors.

Although the characters of these narratives are haunted by different memories of the past, what the authors make them do is understand that the past is merely the past. They are forced to accept - and then embrace - the claims that the past makes upon them. In other words, the characters have to relive the past, reconsider it, and go on with their lives. Other authors of neo-slave narratives (**Reed, Johnson**) treat the serious subject of slavery with light humor. They claim that slavery, as a racial institution, also had a rich, double-edged tradition of humor. Humor was a central, creative means through which African-Americans survived and confronted centuries of oppression. As Glenda Carpio has noted, humor can at once be a strong critique of racial injustice, but at the same time "give life to the whole storehouse of fantasies produced in

the hothouse of a racially divisive past and an equally – if differently – divisive present” (Carpio, 2008, 27). Reed and Johnson challenge the reader to better understand the problematic relationship between an African-American racial history and humor, which may “complicate the distinctions between polite and popular representations of slavery” (Carpio, 2005, 28).

In his novel *Flight to Canada*, using anachronism (the protagonist takes an airplane ride out of slavery), Reed employs historical figures and historical types of plantation owners. The author reveals the seamier sides of slavery and shows the perversion throughout the institution. He hints at a sexual relationship between the plantation owner and the black slave (Mammy Barracuda) as well as his sister. There are also hints of the plantation mistress’s perverse relationship to Mammy Barracuda. The author also broaches the subject that some blacks were complicit in slavery. However, Reed shows that everything and everyone associated with the institution is a fair game. He demonstrates the absurdity of slavery by representing it in an equally absurd way. Reed uses anachronisms to draw parallels between the historical past (the period of slavery) and the 20th c. racial politics. By using the parodic mode the writer raises the question about whether the realistic form of representation can convey the full meaning of slavery today, many years after its official end. The topic of slavery continues in the 21st c. The most outstanding example is **Edward P. Jones’s** novel *The Known World* (2003). Although the primary focus of the book is on slavery, it is the first narrative in which an African-American writer chronicles the holding of enslaved persons by a man of African descent. One of the major purposes of the neo-slave narrative was to show the enslaved people as agents possessing complex humanity. In this novel, however, blacks stand out as villains, and as cruel as whites.

The variety of representations and interpretations of the institution of slavery by writers of neo-slave narratives confirm the fact that the panorama of slavery provides the rich material on which to rewrite, reconsider, and re-envision History.

### **Tutor-Marked Assignment**

1. Discuss the differences and similarities between 19th c. slave narratives and 20th c. neo-slave narratives.
2. What new aspects of slavery are revealed in neo-slave narratives and what purpose do they serve?
3. How does the realist slave narrative differ from the postmodern slave neo-narrative?

### **Contemporary Writers: The Literary Movements in African-American Background**

African- American writers shed light on many phases of black life in the state of America. They were looking for their identities. Their works such as poetry, autobiographies, fiction and essays helped to form the African American literature. Consequently, black writers made a change by affecting their social reality and the literature that had been produced in response to it. The latter witnessed a change from the period of slavery to the present century.

Poetry, oral and slave narratives gave richness and diversity for the writing of the twentieth century. The Harlem Renaissance, Civil Rights and Black Arts Movements played a great role in the development of African American literature. Many well-known black writers appeared including Du Bois, Langston Hughes, Cullen, Wright, Ellison, Baldwin, Amiri Baraka and Brooks. They wrote about their personal experiences and the situation of the blacks in the American society. They used their fiction and poetry to end segregation and protect civil rights. The writers of Harlem Renaissance were influenced by the style of European and American literature (High 212). They created works of high quality.

African American literature has attempted to tell uncomfortable truth. It began with slave narratives. Thus, prose was transformed during the nineteenth century into the protest novel (King & Moody-Turner xi). During the contemporary period, African American authors and artists represent an important part of American literature. Their works were rejected for a long time till the twentieth century. Contemporary African American literature was the beginning point for a new change as slavery and racial segregation became less important subjects (xi). This period is supposed to be the golden age of African American literature. Black American writers want to prove their skill and express the pride of being black. In comparison to the previous generation of writers, there was a remarkable difference in their works.

During the twentieth century, black American writers have produced all literary genres. For instance, Toni Morrison's *beloved* (1987) is an example of fiction representing the new imagining of slavery rather than presenting the tale of a male slave beginning with Frederick Douglass' *The Heroic Slave* in 1853(26).

Contemporary African American literature changed the world. Toni Morrison won the Pulitzer Prize in 1988 for her masterpiece regarding the slave era. A new generation of writers appeared. They were the first African American writers to produce works in the post- Civil Rights era. In the twentieth century African American literature was prominent. Contemporary writers asked new questions and represented new ways of

discovering their society. “African American literature is a living dialogue of ideas; contemporary African American literature is a lively discussion” (King & Moody-Turner 01).

In the early twentieth century, W.E.B. Du Bois and the other younger generation of artists such as Langston Hughes, Zola Neale Hurston, Wallace Thurman and Richard Bruce tried to delimit the meaning of their art. These writers did not search to be believed by whites, but they still had to depend on criticism of the white. Many whites started thinking about blacks’ tragic past; some black writers like Nikki Giovanni do not want the white to pity them. She says: “I really hope no white person even has cause to write about me because they never understand... and they will probably talk about my hard childhood and never understand that .... I was quiet happy” (221). Contemporary African American literature is characterized by tension as Shockley suggests that:

...we should think of contemporary African American literature not in terms of how texts do or do not conform to one aesthetic; rather, we should consider how the African American literary tradition is characterized by multiple aesthetics accompanied by varied and diverse, rather than monolithic, strategies for grappling with questions of race, gender, identity and tradition (02)

In other words, contemporary African American writers tackle subjects in a different way to express criticism and produce a debate.

### **The Main Literary Movements**

African American writers represent novelists, short story writers, poets and playwrights. They began using different forms from slave narratives to fiction. They are represented in American literary movements including realism, naturalism and modernism.

### **African American Literary Realism (1865-1914)**

Realism has been given many definitions. According to the Oxford Companion to American Literature, realism is a “term meaning truth to the observed facts of life”. Howells states that realism came as a reaction to the changes taking place in America in the nineteenth century. It is more than a reflection of social reality; it is its reconstruction. William Dean Howells refers to American realism as “the truthful presentation of materials” (01). African American literature is a distinct form that flourished after the end of the Civil War. During this time, it ignored notion of romance and used realism as a literary device. Before the war, Americans asked for human rights and the abolition of slavery.

However, early nineteenth century American writers, including African Americans attempted to write prose involving realism (Francis 10). Most of the African American authors of the Harlem Renaissance used realism. Many of them employed this literary device to fight racial issues. However, others used realism to portray African American life (01).

American realism has been neglected by black writers as they gave more importance to the romantic works between the Civil War and First World War. The novelist Chesnutt claims that “there have been few realist fiction of African American life” (186).

During this period, black authors did not focus on mainstream realism which exposes race relation in the South to maintain the white audience. The main realistic authors were Chesnutt, Pauline Hopkins and Paul Lawrence Dunbar. Thus, black writers produced a literature that portrays blacks as deserving equality with whites. As a result, they mixed between romance and realism (Jarrett 189). Some critics generally associate realism with a realistic setting, an unobtrusive narration and a focus on the characters’ psychological development. Realistic authors use the language to create disgust toward black mistreatment. Realistic African writers’ works are based on observations of the aspects of African American life including criminality and illiteracy (189).

### **African-American Naturalism**

Naturalism is a literary approach that explores the themes that have a relation with the growth of science in the late nineteenth century. “It meant that human behavior is solely under the control of heredity and social environment” (Hakutani 02). During this time, scientific discourse led to the emergence of literary naturalism. Naturalist writing often depicts the limitations and restrictions imposed on individuals’ freedom. In fact, the stronger example of the denial of freedom is revealed in the system of slavery in the United States and the continuous linkage of the slaves’ position with inferiority (258). During the nineteenth century, the scientific discourse led to the emergence of literary naturalism. The perpetuation of slavery and racial segregation pushed African American naturalists to criticize slavery and the effects of racism (258).

Naturalism had shown African American writers such as Wright, Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin. These writers tried to avoid rebellion, anger and protest. They were influenced by the philosophy of naturalism which helped them to develop their own versions of human rights. They attempted to liberate their fellow human beings from rules imposed on them. As an example, *Black Boy*, which is a novel written by Wright, has a great impact on African American literary criticism (02).

Other black writers like Ellison began to believe that literary naturalism was a burden. It was not a technique for expressing African American reality. In this context, Pizer claims that “naturalism in its own day was often viewed as a threat to the established order because it boldly and vividly depicted the inadequacies of the industrial system which was the foundation of that order” (201).

According to Pizer, African American naturalists took the responsibility of addressing legal and scientific distinction as they became affected by the political and economic system (Dudley 258).

### **African -American Modernism**

Modernism is a movement in art and thought that started in Europe and America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Recently, it has been shaped by African American contributions primarily in the field of music with ragtime, blues, and jazz (Jacques Preface). Modernism emerged when a minority of African Americans lived among the whites in the cities by sharing less public space. It was the moment of the emergence of the racial ghettos inhabited by African Americans (01).

Artists used modernist poems and songs to transmit truth. One of the achievements of modernism is its ability to convey meaning in ordinary language. In this context, Karl suggests that “Language is no longer the primary agent in its old form of communication or as creating subject-object relationships” (16). He adds that “The page or territory is primary, on which language wanders like a lonely adventurer hoping to survive emptiness and whiteness”. Thus, he claims that language turns into a form of music, becoming not only a visual image but an aural one as well (16).

The tactility of language appeared through African American vernacular speech which is part of the larger culture (Karl17). Modernism represented the African American imaginary aiming at rethinking of the status of black culture within the American culture (16).

In the modernist era, the use of African American music in written works did not show the author’s awareness of racial matters. In fact, music such as blues and jazz was used by authors for various purposes including social commentary and political protest. Thus, there is a connection between music and literature. Hence, music or jazz in particular reflected the hopes of African Americans for finding a new life (15).

### **The Neorealism Movement (1970-Presesnt)**

The neorealism movement is related to European realism that was established in the nineteenth century. It describes life as it is actually

lived rather than giving an idealized portrait of the world. It explains the material nature of life as it is. African American literature started to depict realistic life. Slave narratives and autobiographies were the main genre of this period. In this era, writings emphasized on the life of a society and the pressure of their community (Dickson-Carr 177). They were very important because they were based on truth and they were used to talk about the black in a racist country. Therefore, neorealism in African American literature focuses on the real life experiences of black people (Smith 742). Contemporary African American neorealism generally focused on the purpose of giving reflections of the life of African American communities.

During this period, there was diversity in African American literature. All the genres were presented. The most famous African American women writers of the twentieth century are Maya Angelou, Alice Walker and Gloria Naylor (745).

African American neo-realists believe that blacks are social beings who must not to be separated from the; social and historical context which develops their potential and highlights their significance as individuals and giving them more hope (Dickson-Carr 7).

The United States was founded as a country based on justice and equality but it failed to apply these values on African Americans. Hence, the black liberation movement emerged. Literature was a way for black Americans to defend their social situation. It has described the struggles of African Americans with slavery and racism. It contains the portrayals of African American experiences. This kind of literature has been given different names such as black literature, Negro literature, colored literature as well as African American literature which was a response to the lived reality and the fact of segregation.

African American writers shed light on many phases of black life in the state of America. They were looking for their identities. Their works such as poetry, autobiographies, fiction and essays helped to form the African American literature. Consequently, black writers made a change by affecting their social reality and the literature that had been produced in response to it. The latter witnessed a change from the period of slavery to the present century.

### **Conclusion**

In the voracious topics discussed so far, we have been drilled into understanding that the history of African American people is marked with slavery (1619-1865) which is characterized by continuous dehumanization, humiliation, racial segregation and exploitation. African Americans were viewed as people with no history, no cultural

heritage, no tradition, and no identity in white America. For centuries Europeans and Americans advanced racial theories of inferiority, that ascribed African-Americans to the lower species and ignored their ownership of cultural, ethnic and linguistic values.

The African American theorist, critic and writer, Henry Louis Gates Jr. claims the intersexuality is central to African American Literary Tradition. He emphasizes the similarities of African-American texts, especially genre forms and linguistic model which fall into these traditions, since writers have tendency to read and revise of the works of other writers. Therefore, repletion, careful study of previous cultural heritage, is reflected in the process of signifying, which marks the essence of African American literary tradition. Gates goes on to claim, repetition and revision occurs with a signal difference. *Signification* manifests primarily through hidden textual meaning, African past and present.

### **Summary**

African American literary tradition is a combination of cultural memory, the African experience and cosmogony (the origin of universe, or a set of ideas about this). In the United States, the African tradition and experience was modified by the Christian one, a new type of culture and literature was formed. The intentions to define Afro-American literary tradition have always led to contradictory questions, such as:

What is uniquely Black or American about the literature by Black authors? What is the Black protagonist's identity- is it American or African –American? What is African –American identity? Is Black literature of a racial or a more universal nature? What does it mean to be Black in White America? Therefore, at the heart of the Black experience, there is the problem of double-consciousness. In the history of African-American literary tradition, there are two opposing cultural theories regarding the problem being confronted. One theory is "integrationist" and argues that the Black man must strive to integrate into the American experience. It chooses priority of American values over the black ones. The other theory considers integration as impossible because America is not a homogeneous country to integrate into. Thus they speak in favour of group solidarity, ethnic independence and the "negritude" Historically; the African –American writer has always oscillated between these two aesthetic theories.

### **Tutor-Marked Assignment**

1. Discuss the central idea in the works of contemporary African-American writers using any author's work of your choice to buttress your point.
2. Discuss their main literary movements as noted in their works

3. Do a comparative analytical study of the main strands in their literary movements.

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### **MODULE 3                      CARIBBEAN EXPERIENCE: RETURN MIGRATION OF THE WEST INDIANS**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

This module is aimed at exploring the experience of Caribbean migrants in Britain by critical analytical reference to Caryl Phillip's selected novels that are concerned with Caribbean migrants and their experience either in Britain or back on their island of birth. Caryl's works mainly deal with issues of identity and belonging. The critical perspective is historical-biographical. It is necessary to introduce the history of Caribbean migration to Britain to be able to understand what migrants had to experience and what their situation is like nowadays. It is also important to present the British writer of Caribbean origin – Caryl Phillips, whose works address Caribbean experience in Britain, and to define his place in Anglophone Caribbean literature as he has been selected as its representative.

#### **Objectives**

The objectives of this unit is to make us see that Caribbean society were systematically discriminated in all areas of their lives and they were constantly exposed to racial prejudice which gradually turned into verbal and physical violence. During decades of racial riots West Indian migrants were struggling for recognition and integration. In the end, Britain had to accept the fact that it has become a multicultural society and that the mingling of various cultures may be beneficial after all. It will equally enable us to define and clarify the body of Caribbean literature written in English. While tracing its origins and follows its development particularly throughout the twentieth century.

#### **Main Content**

British West Indies are the states in the Caribbean sea which were previously under British control and most of which are currently independent countries. The majority of them have also decided to join the Commonwealth of Nations after they gained independence. Historically, these islands were grouped into: the British Leeward Islands, the British Windward Islands and Jamaica with its dependencies. There have been continuous attempts at creating federations and unions of which the most famous was the West Indian Federation. However, it did not survive long, it only lasted from 1958-62. Its purpose was to form a single state and become independent of Britain. Unfortunately, it collapsed and the states had to continue their struggle for independence each on their own. The first island to separate from Britain was Jamaica in 1962 and the last one was Saint Kitts and Nevis in 1983. There are certain countries which are still under British rule in the present; they are so called British overseas territories.

Before moving to the Caribbean migration, we have to introduce the British colonization of the West Indies, the decline of the British Empire, its subsequent decolonization and the foundation of the Old and the New Commonwealth. The area of the West Indies started to interest the colonial powers basically since the voyage of Christopher Columbus at the end of the 15th century. The islands were gradually colonized by the British, the French, the Dutch and the Spanish. The British colonization of the West Indies took place during the 17th and the 18th century and Britain introduced on the colonized islands both classical and slave trade. The slaves were mainly brought from Africa to work on the West Indian sugar plantations. Slavery was finally abolished by the Slavery Abolition Act in 1833. As a result of the fierce competition among the European imperial powers, the First World War broke out and it caused the decline of the British Empire which gradually lost almost all its colonies. The decolonization happened in two main phases: between the two world wars and after the Second World War. The first phase involved the so called Old Commonwealth countries, such as Canada or Australia, which have a strong cultural link to Britain. The so called New Commonwealth countries gained independence during the second phase and they denote the recently decolonized countries such as those in the Indian subcontinent or the Caribbean. Nowadays, the Commonwealth of Nations represents a loose association of the United Kingdom in charge together with its former colonies which have voluntarily decided to join in and whose membership ensures their equal status.

An interesting phenomenon related to Caribbean migrants is the return migration which describes the process of return to the country of origin. Return migration tends to be permanent and irreversible as opposed to transnational mobility which refers to continual and temporary migration between Britain and the country of origin. In general, the movement from the Caribbean tends to be long-term and one-directional. Return migrants to the Caribbean generally fall into two categories: the pre-retirement returnees and the retirement returnees. On the one hand, there are people who return prior to retirement, usually to earn a living in the region, and, on the other those who return at retirement. The differences between the two categories are mainly based on the length of their stay in Britain. "Short-stay" migrants tended to return within fourteen years and were back in the Caribbean by the early 1970s. Meanwhile, "long-stay" migrants had spent, on average, over thirty years in Britain. The return of "long-stay" migrants is a phenomenon of the late 1980s and the 1990s.

The majority of returnees appear to delay return until they retire and their pensions provide a secure income in the Caribbean. On the other hand, the pre-retirement returnees often come back "home" with the

vision of establishing their own businesses. There are various factors affecting the return migration, especially the economic and socio-cultural ones which seem to be inseparable. One of the chief economic factors is the cost of living back in the Caribbean compared to that in Britain. The housing type is closely related. There has been inflation in land prices in the Caribbean since the 1980s, therefore those who had not invested in housing in the preceding decades or those who owned property neither in Britain nor in the Caribbean, found it extremely hard to return back home and settle there. As most returnees need to convert either property or savings in Britain into homes and perhaps businesses in the Caribbean, it is likely that property owners will predominate among returnees. The income upon return also plays a crucial role in return migration. The migrants are expected to be wealthy after so many years spent abroad; however, the reality is often exactly the opposite. Since in most cases they had to settle for a lower job status and they often had to send remittances to their families and relatives left behind, they did not manage to save enough to ensure a secure life back in their country of origin. They also learnt that many of those who had stayed in the Caribbean built large houses and seem to be prosperous. Social networks also influence the return of migrants. Those who left their relatives behind feel a considerably stronger tendency to return than those who have set up their families in Britain. This return migration is demonstrated in Caryl Phillips' selected prose fiction that will be concisely analyzed towards the later end of this module.

### **How to Define Caribbean Literature**

As has been said alinitio, the term Black British literature also covers Caribbean/West Indian literature, therefore it is reasonable to start with the definition of this more general term. By Black British literature we usually understand literature "[...] created and published in Britain, largely for a British audience, by black writers either born in Britain or who have spent a major portion of their lives in Britain."<sup>50</sup> The very essence of the term suggests a racist connotation by using the term "black". It is irrelevant to classify and define a particular literary movement on the basis of the writer's skin colour. Moreover, the term black usually refers to any non-white authors, including African, South Asian and Caribbean authors. By labelling this literature as Black British, the British academics again suggest that literature produced by black authors is not part of the mainstream British literature. If we want to define Caribbean literature in English, we can find a number of definitions, none of which seems to be fully satisfactory. When defining it, we also have to consider a number of criteria we base our definition on. According to David Dabydeen's definition, "West Indian literature' is that written by people from the West Indies (a geographical entity) on subjects relevant to West Indian history and cultures."<sup>51</sup> We can immediately see a few gaps in this definition. Firstly, people from the

West Indies may produce literature which has nothing to do with West Indian history or culture, secondly, there may be non-West Indian authors who, on the contrary, are concerned with West Indian subjects in their works and thirdly, there may be authors of West Indian origin who emigrated very early in life and therefore spent a considerable part of their life out of the Caribbean, moreover, they may not touch upon West Indian themes either. Therefore, it seems almost impossible to offer an adequate definition of this specific body of literature and if we do define it eventually, we should be aware of the limitations to our own or another author's definition.

Another aspect to be considered when defining Caribbean literature is the various criteria there are to be considered. Should we base our definition on the location where a work is produced, on the origin of its author or on the language in which it is written? Again, none of these criteria seems to be sufficient and reliable, we should rather consider several criteria at once. Caribbean literature does not necessarily have to be written by a Caribbean author, the second or third generation of migrants from the Caribbean already possess, a British citizenship and some of them may have never been to their parents' homeland before. Caribbean literature was originally meant to target on black readership only, however, since the 1950s it has become increasingly popular even among white British readers. As far as the content of Caribbean literature is concerned, there is not a particular theme that would be used universally by all authors. What we can say almost for sure is that this literature reflects very often on the authors' first or second-hand experience and it explores the theme of migration and the subsequent reception of immigrants by the British society. The authors try to control the representation of Black community by means of their literary production. Obviously, there will be quite significant changes in the subject matter in the works by first and second-generation Caribbean writers for their experience differs quite a lot. More on the authors and their themes is to be found later in this chapter. As we can see, it is extremely difficult to define the Caribbean literature which has undergone a long and complicated development since its origins in the eighteenth century to the twenty-first century. Nevertheless, it has experienced a sort of a "boom" since the 1950s and it becomes more and more popular among Another aspect to be considered when defining Caribbean literature is the various criteria there are to be considered. Should we base our definition on the location where a work is produced, on the origin of its author or on the language in which it is written? Again, none of these criteria seems to be sufficient and reliable, we should rather consider several criteria at once. Caribbean literature does not necessarily have to be written by a Caribbean author, the second or third generation of migrants from the Caribbean already possesses a British citizenship and some of them may have never been to their

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## Origins of Caribbean Literature and its Evolution in the Twentieth Century

Some scholars date the beginnings of Anglophone Caribbean literature from 1948, the date of publication of Derek Walcott's first book. It is true that since the 1930s there have been tendencies to create a West Indian national literature written by their own people in the Caribbean creole as a reaction to the educational dominance of the British who ignored the West Indian literature.<sup>52</sup> However, the true origins of Caribbean literature date back to the eighteenth century when the dominant literary genres were: slave narratives, autobiographies, memoirs and letters. The two most famous pioneers in these genres are Olaudah Equiano with his *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa* published in 1789 and Ignatius Sancho with his *The Letters of Ignatius Sancho* (1782). In a way, their experience of rejection and hostility can be likened to the experience of the 1950s immigrants to Britain.

Caribbean literature since the 1950s has experienced a kind of "boom" due to the massive immigration of West Indians, beginning with the Empire Windrush in 1948. Most of the authors who decided to write about their arrival in Britain and their shattered illusions shared the experience of colonization, displacement, slavery, emancipation and nationalism. They came to Britain in search of a better life and opportunities for themselves and their families. They believed in the common heritage with the mother country (Britain), however, they soon realized that they had been mistaken. In the 1950s and 1960s emigration was the major theme of Caribbean literature, writers also examined their colonial experience and the issues of the post-independence period (the independence mainly took place in the 1960s, e.g. in Jamaica and Trinidad). The 1950s and 1960s are associated with the first-generation writers who were primarily novelists. It was not until the 1970s and 1980s that the Caribbean poetry emerged with its forms based on indigenous models and mostly on the oral tradition. This period also witnessed the emergence of women's writing as opposed to the 1950s dominated by male West Indian writers. The 1980s period is typically associated with the second generation of Caribbean writers who explore the metropolitan experience and the condition of being black in the modern world. At the same time many of these authors like to return to the past and examine the history of black experience as the past experience often shapes our present lives.

Frank Birbalsingh proposes in his *Frontiers of Caribbean Literature in English* that the Caribbean literature in English has come in four stages: the first half of the twentieth century; from 1950 to 1965; from 1965 to 1980 and from 1980 to the present. These stages may overlap. The pre-

1950 writers are generally colonial in their outlook, although there are exceptions, notably C. L. R. James, while the 1950-65 writers probe and question this outlook. Writers after 1965 (the third stage) espouse post-Independence interests, while writers after 1980 (the fourth stage) are concerned either with the fate of immigrants living on external frontier, or with the fate of the others like them.

### **First and Second Generation Caribbean Writers and the Themes of their Works**

Migrant literature denotes either works produced in the time of migration or works reflecting on migration, therefore both the first and second generation writers can be called migrant writers if their work is concerned with the issue of migration in one way or another. Very often migrant literature mirrors the writer's experience, either first-hand or second-hand, since migration and displacement have considerably affected the second half of the twentieth century. Caryl Phillips is a migrant writer par excellence, exploring the themes of identity and belonging in his works. He seems to bridge the works of first and second generation writers in that he reflects on the experience of his parents' migration as well as on his generation's experience, thus his work spans the second half of the twentieth century up to now. Among the pioneering male West Indian authors who dominated the 1950s we can cite: Andrew Salkey, Kamau Brathwaite, Wilson Harris, James Berry, George Lamming, Samuel Selvon and V. S. Naipaul, the last two being of Indo-Caribbean origin. This generation of writers share their struggle to assimilate in the hostile British society, their attempts at being accepted and the reality of not being accepted. Since their arrival they are put under the pressure of racial prejudice and systematic discrimination. The feeling of alienation, unbelonging and isolation are common to them. The first generation is typically associated with the dream of returning home. Since most of the migrants came for economic reasons and they meant to get a well-paid job and save some money, they intended to return one day and ensure a better standard of living back home. Most of them left their friends and relatives behind and they relied on re-joining them a few years later. They tended to maintain a strong cultural identity and they did not wish to adopt the British lifestyle and customs unlike the generation of their children. We can often find the use of imagery and colours and objects from the home country (an island in the Caribbean) in their works. In contrast, this imagery is completely unfamiliar for most of the second generation writers who prefer using English images and references.

The second generation Caribbean writers generally consider themselves as being part of British society because unlike their parents they came to Britain at a very early age or they were even born in Britain, therefore they do not know any other home than Britain. They grew up in Britain,

they were educated there and it is natural they feel more at home in Britain than in the West Indies where only some of them return on regular basis. The fact that they feel a part of British society does not mean that they have never experienced racism and discrimination so common to their parents. They have lived through the 1970s and 1980s racial riots and anti-immigration policies but they have learnt to fight for their recognition and integration by participating in various black movements and public protests. They too experience problems with identity and belonging, however, in most cases they do not feel the urge to return to the Caribbean. The writers explore themes of the frontier experience, sometimes they return to the time of their parents' arrival in their fiction but in most cases they share their personal experience of being black (migrant) in contemporary Britain. Among these second generation writers belong: Joan Riley, Caryl Phillips, Mike Phillips, Merle Collins, Meera Syal, Diran Adebayo, Zadie Smith, Courtia Newland and Bernardine Evaristo. To sum up, "The impossibility of achieving a sense of belonging in a racist, white society is the central theme of much black British writing."<sup>55</sup> On the other hand, this theme cannot be universal across different authors' works.

In essence, the new generation of black writers in Britain cannot write about some faraway home from a position of remembrance; they write about Britain from their own British viewpoints and put their own British spins on the world as seen from their very own perspectives. What characterized an earlier black British literature, the migrants' otherness, emanated from their coming to England and searching for a particular kind of perceived Britishness that did not necessarily exist. Black writers born in England have none of these illusions. They are developing within the British landscapes and social groups that they have been born into, writing about their own impressions of Britain from a new British perspective.

While first generation Caribbean writers reflect on their experience of migration from ex-colonies to the racist Britain they thought to be their homeland to some extent, the second generation writers either return to the history to highlight its impact on their present identity or they explore the lives of black people in contemporary Britain. The first generation is more concerned with alienation and displacement whereas the second generation is more concerned with belonging and acceptance.

#### **Unit 4: The Search for Identity**

The issue of identity (ethnic, cultural or national) and belonging is a crucial one for migrants. The fact that they left their home to live in a completely different country whose society feels antipathy and even hostility towards them has a considerable impact on their identity and sense of self. Migrants from very remote parts of the Caribbean are

suddenly brought to a close proximity and they often create tight communities which give them at least a little security. The experience of living in a strongly racist Britain forges a new black identity. The identity formation is a dynamic and long-term process. "Race consciousness has been awakened in these black migrants thanks to the racism of the society into which they have entered. A new identity has been forged in the crucible of racist Britain."<sup>77</sup> British people simply distinguish between two races: white ("we") and black ("them" or "the other"). Coming to Britain with great expectations and with the idea in their mind that Britain is a sort of "home country" for them, their illusions are gradually shattered to pieces. They realize they do not and very probably will not belong in Britain and the only message they hear all around is "go back home". "His presence in England dispels two principal ideas, first that the West Indian and the British do not make up "the same flag" and "the same empire", and second, that England is no home for the West Indian. [...] Their only achievement in London is the education they receive that they are the other – they are inferior and different."<sup>78</sup> As far as their cultural identity is concerned, it is also very dynamic as it keeps changing over time and it is primarily influenced by the process of migration and the subsequent (mostly negative) experience in the host country. There exist two types of cultural interaction: one is inter-Caribbean culture which refers to the interaction between cultures from various parts of the Caribbean, and intra-Caribbean culture which refers to the interaction between Caribbean and British cultures.<sup>79</sup> The level of maintaining links with the original culture influences cultural continuity. In case of second generation migrants, we rather speak about cultural erosion since they seem to be influenced more by British culture than by the West Indian culture.

### **Caribbean Experience and Caryl Phillip's Literary Relevance**

Phillips's first two novels: *The Final Passage* and *A State of Independence* respectively, will be compared and contrasted and eventually, parallels will be drawn between the protagonists' experience and Phillips's own (mainly based on his essays). As for the genre and theme of his first two novels, they can be covered by an umbrella term "migrant writing", more precisely they are travel discourse/travel narrative. They are based on the displacement of Black people which dates back to the history of slavery and colonialism. These displaced and uprooted people are in a constant search for "home", which oscillates someplace between Africa, Caribbean and Britain. The journey that the protagonists of the novels have to undergo is both a physical and a spiritual journey. While in *The Final Passage*, Leila and Michael move from an island in the Caribbean to Britain, Bertram Francis from *A State of Independence* moves in the opposite direction – from Britain back to St Kitts. What follows from Phillips's early pieces of fiction is the fact

that he does not reduce his works to one setting only but he addresses both the Caribbean and Britain.

### **Literary Relevance of *The final passage and State of Independence***

The title of the novel refers to the “Middle Passage” – the process of bringing Africans as slaves from Africa to the Caribbean across the Atlantic. In the novel Leila undergoes the passage from her island in the Caribbean to Britain (London). Apart from the physical journey, the passage may as well be regarded as that from innocence to experience. Only when she has left her home country does Leila realize where her real home is. The passage is final for Leila’s mother who moves to England to undergo medical treatment, however, she dies there. On the other hand, Leila contemplates returning to the island at the end of the novel.

The novel is set on a nameless island which, however, is very probably based on Phillips’s island of birth – St Kitts. Another setting is London where the two protagonists move with their baby boy in order to start a new and hopefully a better life. England is simply associated with great hope and high expectations. The migration takes place roughly in the 1950s, during the period of great migration from the former British colonies. It is Phillips’s family who came to Britain at this point. Although the ending of the novel is ambiguous, it is very likely that Leila would move back to St. Kitts with her little son and the second baby on the way.

The novel tells the story of a nineteen-year old mulatto woman Leila who wants to escape her aimless life and dysfunctional marriage by moving to England with her husband and their little son Calvin. Throughout the novel we learn about her motifs for leaving her native island. She also wants to join there her mother who is seriously ill and who came to Britain to undergo medical treatment. Leila imagines that they would be able to live together happily and she would look after her mother. Unfortunately, their stay in England is a big failure from the beginning to the end. Leila’s mother is in hospital, they have nowhere to stay, their relationship gets even worse and they end up living in a house that is falling apart. Michael puts all the blame on Leila and he soon abandons her. After her mother’s death and her separation from Michael, Leila gives up all her hopes and illusions and she thinks of going back to St Kitts where at least she felt secure and welcome.

The story is narrated in the third person, however, it is seen from Leila’s perspective. Therefore Phillips paradoxically offers a female point of view despite the fact that Leila can be considered a passive character since she represents the submissive role of women in the Caribbean

society. Phillips largely focuses on individual experience by presenting individual histories.

The novel has a clearly disjointed (cyclical) structure, mixing the past with the present. This fragmented narrative should evoke the displacement of its characters. "This disjointed narrative configuration demonstrates the broken histories in the lives of the characters. More than this, it created for the reader a sense of isolation, desperation and loss as depicted in the novel."<sup>82</sup> It consists of five parts which do not follow a chronological order. The first part called "The End" deals with Leila's preparation for the journey to England. The end obviously refers to the end of her life on the island and at the same time a new beginning in London. The second part "Home" goes back to Leila's life on the island and it makes us understand why she finally decides to leave this life behind and start from the scratch elsewhere. We learn about her relationship with Michael whom she marries despite her mother's warnings. They have a baby boy together, Calvin, whom Michael cares little for. He is rather busy having affairs with other women. Combined with her mother's illness and her unexpected "trip" to England, Leila sees her life as a complete failure and so she decides to move to England to make a new start there. "The night before, Leila had decided that if England was going to be a new start after the pain of last year, then she must take as little as possible with her to remind her of the island."<sup>83</sup> England is a place of hope for many people from the Caribbean, including Leila. Unfortunately, she does not realize the consequences this decision can have for their future lives. Not that her relationship with Michael does not improve in London, it even gets worse and he blames her for any trouble that they encounter. The third part called "England" is devoted to their stay in London. It makes the reader follow them from their very first steps until the end. Shortly after their arrival, they start looking for Leila's mother and a place to stay. They find out that she is in hospital and they spend a few nights at her landlord's small place. Discrimination and racial hostility become a common part of their lives. They end up living in a rented house which is nearly falling apart and so is their marriage. Michael stays in the house less and less until he abandons Leila and Calvin for good. He does not support Leila even during the worst time of her life – when her mother dies and her dreams fall into pieces. The fourth part looks back at their journey to England on board of a ship. It follows their arrival in England, their search for Leila's mother, for accommodation and a job for Michael. The final part symbolically called "Winter" refers to the physical coolness of this season, but also to the coolness with which they are treated in England. Last but not least, it represents the coolness of their relationship. Leila ends up deserted, defeated and disillusioned. Having lost her mother, having been abandoned by her husband and being pregnant with a second baby, this time she decides to get rid of all the possessions

reminding her of England and she thinks of going back to St. Kitts where at least she feels secure and welcome. “She began to feed the fire with the objects and garments that reminded her of her five months in England.”<sup>84</sup> Although the novel’s ending is ambiguous, one thing is clear – Leila’s hopes and dreams of a new and better life turn sour. “At the end of the novel Leila’s quest for love, a better life, and happiness remains unfulfilled.”<sup>85</sup>

It is exactly the issue of belonging which appears across Phillips’s works. He portrays characters who, for one reason or another, do not seem to belong and who feel the urge to migrate and look for a place they could finally call “home”. Leila still has a chance to come back home and settle there again, supported by her lifelong friends. However, the situation is much worse for return migrants who have spent decades in Britain and who eventually decide to move back to the Caribbean. What is more, they often feel strangers back “home” and they end up torn between two countries, belonging to neither of them. This is the case of Bertram Francis, the protagonist of Phillips’s second novel *A State of Independence*. Phillips is preoccupied with the search for belonging and identity throughout his works of fiction as well as non-fiction. He can draw inspiration from his own experience of migration: he was born in St Kitts grew up in Britain and he currently keeps moving between Britain, the Caribbean and the United States.

### Conclusion

The aim of this module was to introduce and demonstrate the West Indian experience in Britain by means of exploring migrant writing in English written by Caribbean authors. Caryl Phillips and his selected prose fiction have been selected as outstanding examples of this genre. Since Phillips was born in the West Indies but brought up and educated in Britain and since he currently travels between Britain, the USA and the Caribbean, he is entitled to address the issues of identity and (not) belonging. His characters are frequently displaced, isolated and torn between the country of their birth, the host country (Britain in this case) and the homeland of their ancestors (Africa). Like Phillips himself, they feel the urge to move from one place to another to find a place where they could finally settle and lead a peaceful and meaningful life. Although Phillips has achieved a major literary success, the protagonists of his first two novels keep wandering and they never really achieve anything. He never provides a ready-made conclusion since his novels often end in an ambiguous way.

Significantly, a historical, sociological and demographic perspective of the phenomenon of West Indian migration to Britain was explored. We need to understand when, how and for what reason West Indian had started coming in large numbers in Britain since 1948. The arrival of

Windrush triggered a massive influx of migrants which continued up to the early 1960s when the anti-immigrant policy was launched. The chapter further follows the lives of these migrants in a new country they considered so long to be a sort of their “mother country”. They had come with high expectations of which eventually stayed only shattered illusions. Having had to face systematic discrimination in all fields of life, their self-confidence was undermined and their identity insecure. As a result, most migrants put the hope into their return, however, many of them simply could not afford it. West Indian migrants often ended up doing poorly-paid and unskilled jobs and living in terrible housing conditions. The situation seems to be slowly improving these days, nevertheless all those years of racial violence and terror cannot be easily forgotten.

### **Summary**

The entire discourse here is already devoted to the literary portrayal of West Indian migrant experience. Caribbean historical background, experiences and writings have been voraciously explored in this module. As a related and relevance representative of this movement, we have chosen Caryl Phillips, a young and promising British writer of West Indian origin. Before familiarising the reader with this writer and his early works in particular, Anglophone Caribbean literature has been introduced. However, if we want to provide a definition of Caribbean literature in general, we discover it is a complicated matter. We come across a number of various criteria which could be considered such as the language of the work, the origin of the author, subject matter, etc. It is therefore complicated to decide which author still belongs and which one does not. A brief overview of the Caribbean literature in English has been included as well. Phillips’s biography can facilitate our understanding of his works since he often includes details of his own life. It is also advised that his novels be read together with his essays (or other non-fiction works). Phillips has undoubtedly achieved a major success with his works due to his diligence, talent, originality and his ability of empathy.

### **Tutor Marked Assignment**

1. Discuss identity, self and belongingness as a critical issue that concerns Caribbean literary tradition.
2. What forms the subject matter of the first and second Caribbean writers and their common themes in Caribbean literature?
3. From the origin of Caribbean literature and its evolution in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, discuss some of the prominent scholars that are indispensable literary representatives of that era.

4. Discuss the literary relevance and sterling contribution of Caryl's *Final Passage* and *State of Independence* in Caribbean literature.

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## MODULE 4: COMPARATIVE BLACK LITERATURE AND POST- COLONIALISM: PILLARS, PERIODS AND THEMES

### INTRODUCTION

This module introduces the theoretical framework that is been prominently used in African-American and Caribbean literary discourse. This segment also sees it consequential to get abreast with the mainstream of post-colonial theory.

Postcolonial Literary theory is a literary interpretation of post-colonialism that is, a study of the effects of colonialism on cultures and societies. It is a literary approach that gives a kind of psychological relief to the people (the colonized) for whom it was born. Post-colonial literary theory aims at not only to expose the oddities of colonialism but to reveal and discuss what independent nations especially the African and Caribbean make of themselves even after the demise of colonialism.

### Objectives

At the end of this module, you should be able to understand the following:

1. It aims is to investigate how African-American and Caribbean literary tradition strategically maps, re-maps, and then textualizes the operations of power relations to challenge the workings of colonization and to assess the relationship between authenticity and selfhood.
2. To search through the power of the imagination, a Caribbean narrative of hitherto silenced past challenges the Western articulation and what role it plays, if any, in the recovery of a Caribbean voice and sense of authentic self-hood.
3. To re-examine the power of postcolonial language, seen from the perspective of an operation of discourse, as a tool of enslavement, of liberation and of transformation.
4. To ascertain how the use of cross-rhythms, of interweaving of narratives and discourses, of crossing of borders at the heart of the Anglophone Caribbean novel challenges an essentialist, traditional vision of reality and identity. How this enables a transcultural perspective on identity to be envisioned.

### Main Content

Whenever we hear the names: Chinua Achebe, Homi Bhabha, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Wole Soyinka, Gayatri Spivak, Franz Fanon, Buchi Emecheta ... etc, we directly think of postcolonial literature. Mark Stein, in his book, *Black British Literatures: Novels of Transformation*, said: —***Post-colonial literatures can be defined as those Europhone literatures that***

*have arisen in the wake of European colonialism* (Stein 2004: 201). In the *Oxford dictionary of literary terms*, we find this definition: —*postcolonial literature, a category devised to replace and expand upon what was once called Commonwealth Literature. As a label, it thus covers a very wide range of writings from countries that were once colonies or dependencies of the European powers.* (Oxford Dictionary). Another distinct definition is that of Marie Rose Napierkowski who said that “*postcolonial literature seeks to describe the interactions between European nations and the peoples they colonized.*”

However, the controversies with these definitions is that the process of colonization in itself is not the core of postcolonial studies, and that many postcolonial works were written during colonization so it would not be correct to say that it is the set of works written after the independence of these countries. Besides, most of the independent countries are still dependent on their former colonizers in a way or another. Another fact is that saying that postcolonial writers were influenced by western studies is not exactly how these writers wanted to be remembered.

History has become a crucial issue in literature thanks to postcolonial literature, and we can see that through its definition. Cultural and ideological implications of a literary text also have become important since the emergence of postcolonial studies. The postcolonial text serves as a vehicle to transmit the identity and national interest of a society. Besides, postcolonial literature attempts to get rid of the fact that it has no history or literature, a quality which was attributed to it by many imperial texts. These facts make the themes in postcolonial literatures widely varying: place and displacement, language, hybridity, identity, colonialism, resistance ... etc.

With time, scholars have tried to refine the definition of postcolonial literature to make it more plausible, such as the following:

Postcolonial literature (or Post-colonial literature, sometimes called New English literature(s)), is a body of literary writings that reacts to the discourse of colonization. Post-colonial literature often involves writings that deal with issues of de-colonization or the political and cultural independence of people formerly subjugated to colonial rule. It is also a literary critique to texts that carry racist or colonial undertones. Postcolonial literature, finally in its most recent form, also attempts to critique the contemporary postcolonial discourse that has been shaped over recent times. It

attempts to re-read this very emergence of postcolonialism and its literary expression itself.  
(Online Encyclopedia)

Other scholars say that the postcolonial writers subvert the colonial discourse by using specific techniques such as telling a known story from the view of an oppressed character in it. Also, it is generally recognized that the main characters in postcolonial literature are always struggling to construct their identity feeling trapped between their native culture and the newly hybridized dominant culture.

In the *MA English-Literature* essays, they say that postcolonial literature represents any writings after independence which tackle one of these subjects: the new cultural identity of the colonized (that is to deal with the occurring cultural and social changes within postcolonial societies), the notion of independence in itself (whether these postcolonial societies are really fully independent or not), and the issue of marginalization and alienation (within the western society, or their own postcolonial society). So, no matters how variant are the ways scholars perceive postcolonial literature, they always get close around the same perspectives.

In *The Concise Oxford Companion to English Literature*, Drabble and Stringer define postcolonial literature as follows: —***post-colonial literature consists of a body of writing emanating from Europe's former colonies which addresses questions of history, identity, ethnicity, gender and language*** (Drabble and Stringer, 2003), they add that looking for a national political and cultural awakening, postcolonial literatures relied on popular resistance to abolish colonial rule, in a way to unveil the truth that there is no such a thing as a passive native.

Another important definition is that of Ashcroft et al in *The Empire Writes Back*, who think that, semantically speaking, the term postcolonial literature is used to describe the literatures interested in the national culture after independence. To point at national literature people used to say “modern Canadian writing” or “recent west Indian literature”.

Consequently, Postcolonial, as a term, suggests resistance to “colonial” power and its discourses that continues to shape various cultures, including those whose revolutions have overthrown formal ties to their colonial rulers. Postcolonial theory, therefore, focuses on subverting the colonizer’s discourse that attempts to distort the experience and realities, and inscribe inferiority on the colonized people in order to exercise total control. It is also concerned with the production of literature by colonized peoples that articulates their identity and reclaims their past in the face of that past's inevitable otherness. The task of a postcolonial

theorist is to insert the often 'absent' colonized subject into the dominant discourse in a way that it resists/subverts the authority of the colonizer. Post-colonialism emerges as a result of colonialism. It refers to the discourse that deals with "the effects of colonization on culture and societies" (Ashcroft, et al., 2007: 168). It concerns with the culture after the period of colonialism until the present days or, in other words, the post-independence period. During or precisely after the colonial period, the colonizer's thoughts, particularly Western thoughts, have dominated world's culture and marginalized the colonized culture (Selden and Widdowson, 1993: 189). The colonizer's culture is seen as the higher and superior one, above the colonized culture that is seen as the 'Other'. Post-colonialism then gives another perception in seeing the relation between the colonizer and the colonized. It questions the validity of the assumptions that the colonizer's culture is better than the colonized culture. Since there are many people in many countries in the world that had experienced colonialism, post-colonialism provides a crucial way in expressing the realities of the colonized people.

Postcolonial literature comes from the broadest term post colonialism which deals basically with the period of colonialism and its aftermath. The editors of *The Empire Writes Back* state that postcolonial literature and post colonialism in general, also deal with the resultant of colonialism which is cross -cultural discourse and its effect on the literature produced in the postcolonial world. (2) That's why Post colonialism appeared as a literary theory to study literatures of the formerly colonized nations, mainly those colonized by European powers such as Britain. It takes also into consideration the literature of colonial writers who make of the portrayal of colonized citizens their subject matter.

In addition, post colonialism depicts the identity of the colonized society; it deals with the huge challenge of building a national identity following a harmful experience and how writers talk about and celebrate that identity, often reclaiming it from, and maintaining strong connections with the colonizer. They do it through producing a literature that debates cultural identity and criticizes the change that occurred during colonization and in the present state of the postcolonial societies. Postcolonial literature deals with the cultural change that occurred in the postcolonial societies and led to a cross-cultural state in literature and society.

However, this focus on the quest for identity has been widely criticized. Some scholars claim that this has become an obsession for postcolonial writers with this issue while others argue that identity is an important aspect of understanding the self and in identifying with society and the rest of the world. It is obvious that characters and mainly protagonists in

postcolonial novels are often pictured as struggling to figure out who they are, and attempting to find their place in between the old native world and the imperial world. These literary works written by postcolonial literary authors like: Chinua Achebe, Ngugi Wa Thiongo, Alice Walker, Jamaica Kincaid, Audre Lorde, George Lamming, just to mention but a few, depict the crucial question for postcolonial writers and their people about the nature of the newly emerging identity. They arise a broader and more complicated question about where do they fit in this new world order.

This quest for identity in the postcolonial literature has been revolving around the key features that forge and build an identity. These key features overlap; that is, when tackling one of them we find ourselves unconsciously talking about the other. Some of these key features consist of the notions of migration, hybridity, multiculturalism and otherness. The African-American and Caribbean literature is in fact a very striking example of postcolonial literature since it explores the struggle for the quest of identity.

### **Themes of Post-colonial literature**

Barry (1995: 193) states that there are four themes of postcolonial literature. The first characteristic is “an awareness of representations of the non-European as exotic or immoral ‘Other’, which is still related to Fanon’s idea of reclaiming one’s own past or pre-colonial era and thus rejecting the modern or the colonial era. Here, post-colonial writers create a pre-colonial version of their nation without referring to the colonial era which has been tainted with colonial knowledge.

The second is the concern with colonial language. Since it is originally the colonizer’s language, postcolonial writers feel that the language belongs to somebody else. They also feel that the language should not be moved around, changed, or modified without permission. Therefore, using it will involve an agreement in colonial structures.

The third is the recognition of an identity as double or hybrid. It concerns with identity issues. Post-colonial writers often have double identity, one identity as the colonizer and the other as the colonized, and it is reflected in their writings. As post-colonial literary criticism is aware of the representation of other cultures in literature, it can recognize the presence of such double identity.

The last is the emphasis on ‘cross-cultural’ interactions, as postcolonial writers seem to make a transition from the European models into African or Asian forms. The transition has three phases (Barry, 1995: 195). The first is ‘adopt’ phase, when the writers adopt the European form as it stands because it is assumed as universally valid.

The second is 'adapt' phase, when the writers adapt European form to African or Asian matters. The last is 'adept' phase, when the writers remake the form with its own characteristics, without reference to European form.

The main subject matter in the earlier phase of post-colonial criticism was about the West's perception towards the East. At the beginning, post-colonial criticism tried to criticize the limitations and biases which are presented in the West's perception only. However, in the latter phase, post-colonial criticism is also concerned with the explorations of the post-colonial societies and celebrates diversity, hybridity, and difference. Therefore, it is not always about the 'rivalry' between the colonizer and the colonized.

However, for Ashcroft et al, the term postcolonial literature is used to denote all literature covering the culture influenced by imperialism from the beginning of colonization till now. On another hand, they hesitate to place the literature of the United States under this category, and they argue that it is due to its relationship to a colonial centre (Britain) that it could be seen as postcolonial.

What is important is that these literatures share the characteristic —*that they emerged in their present form out of the experience of colonization and asserted themselves by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power, and by emphasizing their differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre* (Ashcroft et al 2002: 2) and this is the quality which emphasizes their postcoloniality.

According to *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*, postcolonial literature faces a great dilemma which is replacing „English literature” by “world literature” through the process of changing “Anglo-centric assumptions”. For Ania Loomba, books written on postcolonial literatures concern themselves only with —*literatures written in English, or widely available in translation, or those that have made the best-seller lists in Europe and the United States* (Loomba 1998: 93), a fact that has to be reconsidered. In the *Encyclopedia of Literature and Criticism*, Coyle et al say that postcolonial literature is passive and subjugated in the view of Anglo-European studies, but in their own view this literature is neither passive nor isolated, and we cannot account for it appropriately without taking into consideration its textual relations.

Postcolonial literature went through phases matching the development of the national uprising and strong desire to split from the metropolitan centre. During colonization writings were produced in the colonizers’ language by —*a literate elite whose primary identification is with the colonizing power* (Ashcroft et al 2002: 5). These texts were primarily produced by writers who represent the colonizing centre: settlers,

travelers, soldiers ... etc. These writings, according to Ashcroft et al, cannot be classified under the category of indigenous culture or native culture, despite the fact that they write about the colonized countries, they seem to privilege the colonizing centre. And these literatures' loyalty to imperialism is hidden under their claimed objectivity which hides the imperial discourse where they were born.

After that period, the "natives" and the "outcasts" produced a literature which was given license only by the empire. Like the nineteenth century literature produced by the "English educated upper class" and the "African missionary literature". Such a category of writers felt they were advantaged because they had at hand the colonizer's language and education.

These literatures did deal with subjects like —*the brutality of the convict system [...] the historical potency of the supplanted and denigrated native cultures [...] or the existence of a rich cultural heritage older and more extensive than that of Europe* (Ashcroft et al 2002: 6) but they could not fully develop the theme of subversion or explore their anti-colonial orientation. These literatures were produced under colonial control which granted permission concerning what is appropriate or not, and concerning the distribution of the work, Ashcroft et al add to this: —*texts of this kind come into being within the constraints of a discourse and the institutional practice of a patronage system which limits and undercuts their assertion of a different perspective* (Ashcroft et al 2002: 6). The literature produced by those who wanted to end these restrictions and use their writings for different and more efficient objectives appear in what Ashcroft et al call "modern post-colonial literatures".

Besides the issues of language, hegemony and what have been discussed before, postcolonial literature discusses the issue of place and displacement in which, as Ashcroft et al think, —*the special post-colonial crisis of identity comes into being; the concern with the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place* (Ashcroft et al 2002: 8). So, and as Lazarus postulates, to say that a writer or a piece of writing is postcolonial was to date it back to a certain moment or to relate it to a specific period in time, or to relate it to a certain community or identity, but with time, this scope has broadened and the reference has changed, and this could be seen in its relation with the world.

On the relationship of postcolonial literature with the western literary canon, John Marx in *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies* says that he identifies three sorts of relationships but he deals only with two of them which he thinks are familiar to everybody

else. The first one is that postcolonial literature repudiates the canon. According to him, the universal audience has become experienced and well trained in considering the colonized literature as the “antithesis” of the literature of the canon and as an effective way to restore the traditional literature and culture that the colonizer tried to erase.

The second point is that postcolonial literature is trying to make a revision of texts and concepts belonging to the canon. And here Marx explains that the audience considers that postcolonial literatures criticize Western literatures by using many techniques like rewriting some works, or appropriating some genres ... etc. He adds: —*the fact that a writer's capacity to represent a place and its people is widely considered relevant to determining canonicity suggests how dramatically postcolonial literature has changed what we mean when we say —the canon* (Lazarus 2004: 85)

### Postcolonial Literary Theory

Postcolonial Literary theory is a literary interpretation of post-colonialism that is, a study of the effects of colonialism on cultures and societies. It is a literary approach that gives a kind of psychological relief to the people (the colonized) for whom it is conceived. Post-colonial literary theory aims at not only to exposing the oddities of colonialism but to reveal and discuss what independent nations especially the African-American and Caribbean people make of themselves even after the demise of colonialism.

Consequently, Postcoloniality, as a concept, suggests resistance to “colonial” power and its discourses that continue to shape various cultures, including those whose revolutions have overthrown formal ties to their colonial rulers. Postcolonial theory, therefore, focuses on subverting the colonizer's discourse that attempts to distort the experience and realities of the colonized, and inscribe inferiority on the colonized people in order to exercise a literature of total control. It is also concerned with the production of literature by colonized peoples that articulates their identity and reclaims their past in the face of that past's reduction to otherness. The task of a postcolonial theorist or critic is to insert the often ‘absent’ colonized subject into the dominant discourse in a way that it resists and subverts the authority of the colonizer.

Chinua Achebe, Edward Said, Helen Tiffin, Frantz Fanon and Homi K. Bhabha to mention but a few, have popularized the theory in the later years. Chinua Achebe a pulsating postcolonial voice has pointed out the abysmal nature of colonialism which needs to be abhorred with an overwhelming passion and prejudice if the African truly recognize the gravity of the evil associated with colonialism and its history. Achebe in

his prominent and outstanding article “The Novelist as a Teacher” unequivocally asserts that;

Postcolonialism is born at the very first moment of colonial contact. It is the speech of oppositionality which colonialism brings into being. The postcolonial literature shows the upshot of colonialism and reveals the nostalgic self of the colonized. For a colonized is bound to put up with the different disconcerting situations. He has to have high resistance and fortitude against lots of uncalled entrapment and enslavement. (137)

In approaching the concern of postcolonial literary theory, Edward Said depicts that “postcolonial literature knocks on the door of the colonized intending to commune with them. For it aims at entering the inner sanctum and bringing into picture their cries of loss and their proclamation of birth” (25).

Speaking further on the concept of postcolonial literature, Helen Tiffin justifies that “postcolonial literary theory indicates a new way of thinking in which cultural, intellectual, economic or political processes are seen to work together in the formation, perpetuation and dismantling colonialism” (13).

Elucidating further on the issue of postcolonial literary theory, Frantz Fanon presents that “through the postcolonial discourse, a hysterical violence and radical resistance is captured especially in the Caribbean people where violence is understood as an attack on the callous culture, ideas, and value systems of the colonial people” (10).

Emphasizing more pertinently on the concept of postcolonialism, Homi K. Bhabha denotes that “postcolonial literary theory analyses itself with the metaphysical, ethical, and political concerns of the colonial people and the quest for identity concerns itself with the study of the colonization which began as early as the Renaissance and involves winning back and reconstituting the native cultures” (17).

Among the Caribbean literary artists, Kincaid’s novels and essays have played crucial roles in the growth of postcolonial literary theory and indigenous knowledge inclinations.

The ancestry of postcolonial criticism and theory can be traced to Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*, both published in French in 1952, and 1961 respectively. Fanon was a

Martinique-born black psychiatrist and anti-colonialist intellectual who wrote from the perspective of a colonial subject in the thick of decolonization, addresses other colonial subjects. He places the cultural aspect of colonial and postcolonial history at the centre of his discussion. Various anti-colonial theories have influenced the oppressed peoples of the world; but *The Wretched of the Earth* has articulated more effectively, profoundly and lastingly than any other anti-colonial work on behalf of and in service to the extensive life of the colonized.

In Bhabha's own terms: 'colonial discourse produces the colonized as a social reality which is at once an 'other' and yet entirely knowable and visible (101)'. According to Bhabha, 'hybridity' is a kind of negotiation between the colonizer and the colonized.

He seems to stress the idea that both the colonizer and the colonized are interdependent, both politically and culturally. His concept of 'otherness' is derived from Lacan's 'Other' and Fanon's idea of 'Other' as binary opposition between White and Black.

Postcolonial studies often involve a prolonged engagement with issues such as terrain, people and their relationships, wealth, power and its resistance, historical continuity and change, representation and culture, knowledge and its construction. Though post colonialism is 'the discourse of the colonized' as described by Ashcroft, it has the potential to assemble new communities with political and ethical commitment to challenging and questioning the practices of domination and subjugation, the whole idea of cultural hegemony. Theories of colonial discourses play a very influential role in the development of post colonialism. They explore how representations and modes of perception are used as fundamental weapons of colonial power to keep the colonized subservient to them. Colonialism creates the notion in the mind of the colonized that it is their birth right to rule over other peoples and there is a deliberate process of colonizing the mind. They do it by persuading the colonized to accept and internalize its logic and speak its language.

It is obviously established that postcolonial literary theory evolved as a literary interpretation of the growing postcolonial theorization of the late 60's and 70's. Literary texts were therefore analyzed based on ethno-historical tools for deciphering the dialects of cultural forms and politics of power, colonialism and apartheid.

In postcolonial theory we find a focus on how hybrids are conceived. Hybridization is seen in a binary way, the mixing of races and the alienation of some races to point at —*the Victorian extreme right which regarded different races as different species [...] according to*

**Robert Young** (Loomba 1998: 173) and this also gives ground to criticism arguing that the notion of “hybridity” underestimates —*the clash between the colonizer and the colonized and therefore misrepresent the dynamics of anti-colonial struggle* (Loomba 1998: 181). And again she gives the example of nationalist movements like “negritude” which are alienated and cannot conform to such a notion as hybridity. Another criticism to this theory is that it has a pessimistic tone since it is, as the writer says, the child of postmodernism.

On the importance of using postcolonial theory, Lang at, A. K. in the article presented to the Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE) in 2005, relying on the views of many scholars like Gandhi, summarizes it into the following points: rethinking “self”, deconstructing the discourse of the “regimes of othering”, reconstructing “historical self-invention”, and recreating or deleting the “painful memories of the colonial era” and its consequences after independence like the imperial linguistic, literary and cultural domination.

In the section entitled *Decolonizing Culture* in *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*, Katrak says that some critics try to use what he calls “fashionable theoretical models” for two reasons: the first one is to substantiate postcolonial literatures and to emphasize their worthiness by using “complicated Eurocentric models, and the second one is , as Katrak states, —*to succumb to the lure of engaging in a hegemonic discourse of Western theory given that it is difficult‘ or challenging,‘ often for the sole purpose of demonstrating its shortcomings for an interpretation of postcolonial texts.* (Ashcroft et al 1995: 256).

In addition to that, Martin Denyer, a visiting lecturer in visual culture at Middlesex University, in his essay entitled *What and Where is Postcolonial Theory?*, says that it examines the European domination of non-European peoples, lands, and cultures. However, it examines essentially the immanent views implemented by imperial colonization about Europe being superior to the countries it has once colonized, and the damages it has caused to their self-identity. He adds that the issues of ethnicity, hybridity, and displacement ... etc constitute only three topics in postcolonial theory which lead to discuss the vast topic of the diversity of cultural identity. So, this makes of national identity a main issue in postcolonial theory.

It is known that this theory has emerged with the publication of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* in 1978, which in fact, according to Leela Gandhi, developed in a quite poststructuralist environment incarnated by the figures of Derrida and Foucault. She argues that Said’s ideas relied essentially on the work of Foucault, and that Spivak’s work dealt with —*the task of dialogue and negotiation with and between Derrida and*

**Foucault** (Gandhi 1998: 26-27). So, it is due to poststructuralism and postmodernism, and their relation to Marxism that postcolonial theory exists. She blames this theory for its limited constituency and its excessive focus on politics rather than theory.

Gandhi adds to this that its first phase is Orientalism. Postcolonial theory is concerned with defending the “marginalized other” living within “repressive structures” of domination. It is also concerned with reversing the existing order of gender, culture, and race. In a way or another, Gandhi tries to say that postcolonial theory is an extension to western theory. In the section entitled *The Limits of Postcolonial Theory* she says: —**postcolonial theory is situated somewhere in the interstices between Marxism and postmodernism/poststructuralism** (Gandhi 1998: 167).

Professor John Lye, in his essay *Some Issues in Postcolonial Theory*, said that postcolonial theory depends mostly on the notion of otherness and resistance. He says: —**Post-colonial theory deals with the reading and writing of literature written in previously or currently colonized countries, or literature written in colonizing countries which deals with colonization or colonized peoples**. The main concerns of this theory are how the literature produced by the colonizers changes the reality of the colonized and immortalizes the sense of inferiority within them; and how the literature of the colonized tries to express their identity and tries to regain their lost past exterminated by the new past which put them in the column of “otherness”. If we look for the definition of postcolonial theory in any encyclopedia, we would find this definition: —**Post-colonialism (postcolonial theory, post-colonial theory) is a specifically post-modern intellectual discourse that consists of reactions to, and analysis of, the cultural legacy of colonialism**. (WIKIPEDIA)

Postcolonial theory tries to answer questions about the notions of language, home, identity, hybridity and so on, on the basis that the colonizer wants to achieve his control and effect on those notions through the process of “knowing” the other, as Ashcroft says in *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*: “to name the world is to “understand” it, to know it and to have control over it” (Ashcroft et al 1995: 283). And as David Washburn in his essay thinks that —**knowledge is power, and words, whether written or spoken, are the medium of exchange, using words incurs responsibility**.

Ashcroft et al also define postcolonial theory as a discussion of —**migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, representation, difference, race, gender, place, and responses to the influential master discourses of imperial Europe [...] and the fundamental experiences of speaking**

*and writing by which all these come into being* (Ashcroft et al 1995: 2). Washburn says that the critical nature of postcolonial theory brings about the disturbance of western thought, and thus giving room to the marginalized people to make their voices heard and find alternatives to the dominant voices.

Furthermore, Colin Wright in one of his essays said that Terry Eagleton in one of his articles has accused postcolonial theory of: obscurantism, narcissism, solipsism, political disorientation, and complicity with American Cultural imperialism. Many postcolonial theorists think that the colonizer still exercises control over the colonized even after independence, so, as Cotey Binns points out: “by exposing a culture’s colonial history, postcolonial theory empowers a society with the ability to value itself”. Postcolonial theory emerged from the writings of counter-colonial resistance writers such as Fanon, Said and Spivak. As stated in the Oxford dictionary of literary terms:

*Postcolonial theory considers vexed cultural-political questions of national and ethnic identity, otherness, race, imperialism, and language, during and after the colonial periods. It draws upon post-structuralist theories such as those of deconstruction in order to unravel the complex relations between imperial centre and colonial periphery, often in ways that have been criticized for being excessively abstruse. (Oxford Dictionary)*

As mentioned in *The Empire Writes Back*, the very idea of a postcolonial theory comes out of the incapacity of the existing European theory to handle the complexity and cultural diversity of postcolonial writings. According to it, the political and cultural monocentrism of the colonizer emerged as a consequence of the “representation” system of Europe. So, the notion of expansion grew up in Europe which caused a cultural subservience. The reaction to this was the development of what Ashcroft et al call “identifiable indigenous theories” which was the cause of a growing national consciousness.

### **Critical Approaches to Postcolonial Texts**

In the field of critical literature, according to Figueira, there is no clear agreement among scholars on how to approach postcolonial texts or what makes the canon of postcolonial criticism. She claims that with the definitions of postcolonial criticism which we have at hands, we can understand the reason behind this disagreement. For this reason, we shall deal with a sample of these definitions to make the latter idea clear. Ashcroft et al define it as follows: —*postcolonial criticism —covers all the cultures affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day* (cited by Figueira 2008: 31); Mishra and Hodge say that postcolonial criticism “*foregrounds a politics of*

*opposition and struggle, and problematizes the key relationship between centre and periphery* (cited by Figueira 2008: 31).

The current definitions are given by, as Figueira mentions, anthologies or interpreters to key theorists who never question the attitudes that lead to this refusal to define postcolonial criticism in any way. This ambiguity, she thinks, lies in the relation of postcolonialism to postmodernism and their compatibility, especially in matters like rejecting fixed meanings and stable identities.

Harrington presumes that postcolonial criticism emerges from the assumption to anthropological studies of art. It identifies the irrelevance of indigenous cultures with western aesthetics. He adds that, it deals with the ethnocentric view of other cultures by western discourses and their relationship, and with the exclusionary cultural discourses. Kamada cited what Young observed that —*since Sartre, Fanon and Memmi, postcolonial criticism has constructed two antithetical groups, the colonizer and the colonized, self and Other ... a Manichean division threatens to reproduce the static, essentialist categories it seeks to undo* (Kamada 2010: 128).

Dirlik says that the field of postcolonial criticism has evolved during this last decade. He says that this kind of criticism has evolved bearing the traits of the early postcolonial discourse, putting the emphasis again on the ethnocentricity of the colonial experience, but this criticism left early discourse behind by questioning the very meaning of colonization. Ross Murfin and Supryia M. Ray, on the origins of the postcolonial criticism said:

Postcolonial criticism has been influenced by Marxist thought, by the work of Michel Foucault [...], and by deconstruction, which has challenged not only hierarchical, binary oppositions such as West/East and North/South but also the notions of superiority associated with the first term of each opposition. (Bedford Books: 1998)

The fact that the majority of postcolonial intellectuals belong to the category of English studies, makes of postcolonial criticism of a worldwide interest, since it enhances the universal audience to read in translation. For postcolonial critics, their task is to clarify, unveil, and deconstruct the —*themes of citizenship and the modern state* (Figueira 2008: 33). She adds that if we study the literature which makes the concern of postcolonial criticism, we would find to which extent the ideological attitudes —*reifying critical jargon and strategies of self-representation* (Figueira 2008: 38) have restricted the intellectual severity and development of that study or analysis. For her, the task of a

postcolonial critic is to reveal the concept of violence exercised by western art and history over subaltern people. She adds that, postcolonial criticism together with socialist and feminist criticisms hold the position about the “*mutually reinforcing significance of class, gender and ethnicity as dimensions of hegemony and domination* (Figueira 2008: 52).

Dirlik, on contemporary postcolonial criticism, said that it repudiates the Third-World division implemented by developmental meta-narratives. It also favors the marginalized figures of the excluded societies. Dirlik adds that:

*Postcolonial criticism has moved past —Manichean divisions between the colonizer and the colonized, [...], to stress —borderlands conditions, where the domination of one by the other yields before boundary crossings, hybridities, mutual appropriations, and [...] the everyday resistance of the colonized to the colonizer.* (Dirlik 2002: 433)

Figueira criticized postcolonial criticism by saying that it removes the postcolonial people from their historical and class identification, and thus perpetuates structural racism. While Parekh and Jangne use what Barber proclaims, to criticize postcolonial criticism, that it consigns “*indigenous language expression to the background, paradoxically by an inflation of its role as source and resource to the Anglophone written tradition* (Parekh and Jangne 1998: 4) thus explores the insecure area of exaggerating and at the same time simplifying the impact of the domination of European languages , and transforming the colonizer to a static “monolith” and the colonized to homogenous “token”.

On this aspect, Dirlik says that postcolonial criticism dehistoricizes colonialism, a fact that blurs the relationship between the period of colonization and its aftermath which has been the reason for the emergence of the postcolonial discourse in the first place. However, he comes back to the reason behind the spread of postcolonial criticism and says:

Contemporary postcolonial criticism derives much of its force and plausibility from radical changes in the world situation, changes that are in part consequences of decolonization, and also of transformations in capitalism provoked by anticolonial struggles of the past (Dirlik 2002: 439)

### **Aesthetics of Identity in Post-Colonial Literature**

Postcolonial Identity is a central theme to postcolonial literature since it is the result of the process of colonialism; a thing that justifies all the debates and controversies that underlie this notion and which have been dealt with earlier. This identity is forged by the colonial history and the post-colonial predicament a thing that led to the emergence of cultural and spatial elements that affected the postcolonial identity and postcolonial writers. As Albert.J Paolini postulated in *Navigating Modernity*: **—If postcolonialism forms part of a struggle over discursive power in the constitution of identity, then history, in particular colonial history, also pay a significant part.** (Paolini 1999: 51)

In fact, one of the main reasons that pushed colonized peoples to rebel against colonial powers is the feeling that they begun losing the components that forge their identity. As Paolini reports Stephen Slemon **—to continue the resistance to (neo)colonialism through a deconstructive reading of its rhetoric and to achieve and reinscribe those post-colonial traditions... as principles of cultural identity and survival.** (Paolini 1999: 64). He carries on postulating that this resistance to colonization and this search for a distinct independent identity constitute some of the basic elements of post -colonialism. So post -colonialism is a notion that came to stress the role of postcolonial peoples in the world and to bring to life their voices as distinct from their colonizers' voice. It came to highlight the postcolonial identity as different from the colonial one. For this, Paolini says the postcolonial "Other" comes back in a newly formed identity that is far away from western identity, he reports Helen Tiffin's words that:

**Postcolonial writers —rehabilitate the self against European appropriation. In fracturing imposed European master narratives and perspectives, Postcolonialism replaces them with an —alternative vision. This is particularly the case for —indigenous peoples (India, Africa) who are able —to challenge European perspectives with their own metaphysical systems.** (Paolini 1999: 79)

This postcolonial identity can be defined through various elements that constitute it; for instance Otherness which is a key concept in defining the postcolonial identity as referring to how colonial and postcolonial subjects see each other, or more accurately how the West sees the rest and vice versa; and also how postcolonial subjects perceive themselves within their own societies. For, as Couze Venn said: **—identity is an entity that emerges in relation to another or others; it is a plural self...** (Couze 2006: 2)

Not only Otherness is a key feature that defines postcolonial identity, there is also the issue of language and place. John McLeod reported

Bhabha's words talking about place and its effect on postcolonial identity when saying that: —*we find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity* (McLeod 2000: 217). The issue of language is widely dealt with since it is a really controversial issue when it comes to studying postcolonial literary works which constituted a unique identity through the hybrid language used by postcolonial writers; that's why hybridity is also one of the key features that forge the postcolonial identity.

It has been profusely knitted in that postcolonial theory for instance examines the imposed superiority that the colonizer exercises on his colonial subjects, a fact that intensifies their sense of inferiority and damages their self-identity; a thing that led postcolonial writers to write against it and try to reinforce that identity. Postcolonial theory also deals with issues like hybridity, ethnicity and multiculturalism.

So, the term postcolonial literature was used only to determine the historical period of colonialism and independence that many postcolonial writers covered through their works. It was also used to denote only literatures written in English, or commonwealth literature, however this term is broader than that since the European languages are not the only means of expression of this literature.

This term also entails, through what has been seen in the debate over its meaning, the representation of identity in the modern world, it deals with cultures and literatures influenced in a way or another by imperialism since the moment of colonization till the present day. To this end, therefore, post colonialism does not only denote the decolonization of lands, but also the decolonization of cultures. And through this process the identity of the postcolonial subjects comes to be affected by that experience and thus changed.

The question of identity is very important to any nation because it shapes its international relations and dictates its behavior. According to Ninkovich "an identity crisis is a period of disorientation in which values and relationships once taken for granted are thrown into question. Questions of self-adjustment that bedevil individuals caught up in an identity crisis like "who am I?" and "where do I belong?" (Ninkovich 2001,16).

The question of postcolonial identity forms a large disagreement among postcolonial theorists because, according to Hawley, there are two antithetical sorts of identity. The type of identity as viewed by essentialists and that as viewed by constructionists. Essentialists bear the view of nationalists who go for the establishment of a pre-colonial identity on a specific racial basis that is harmless to individual

differences; whereas constructionists think that identity is shaped by external forces such as society, and this fact causes a “split” in the identity(240).

But the fact of achieving an establishment of a pre-colonial identity for Vermeulen and D’haen is practically impossible, and they argue by what Simon Gikandi thinks that this abolishment of the influence of colonization is a way to legitimize the failure of nationalists to “transcend the imperial legacy” (Vermeulen and D’haen 2006, 150) since they use the same principles to highlight one side of national identity over the other sides (150). So, as Leonard Orr in his book *Joyce, imperialism, and post colonialism* said, the —[...] ***Question of national identity affects anyone brought up in the shadow of imperialism*** (Orr 2008, 77).

“Colonization=chosification” (Césaire 1955, 12), this is how Aimé Césaire describes the process of colonialism. He said that people describe it as development, cured illnesses, and high standards of life...etc while Césaire considers it from a completely different angle. He sees hollow societies, stamped cultures, confiscated lands, artistic magnificence wrecked...etc, and above all he sees millions of men who were inculcated fear and the complex of inferiority (12).

The experience of imperialism has been translated textually through the novels of the nineteenth and twentieth century.

Accordingly, Boehmer, in his book *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*, the beginning of the European colonization was characterized by the people’s need to use ancient stories in creating a new world. The early literature of colonization sustained the idea of exploring, translating and interpreting different countries to enhance their audience to conquer and explore their gains. So, these colonizers experienced an exceptional mobility of people for hunting their accumulations. Thus, through literature, the colonial thought spread in an unprecedented way, and the whole world was actually under colonial control.

This domination resulted in the rise of national resistance in all ways including literature. So, nationalist movements sought to defy “self-representations” of the colonizer through creating a “self-defining story”. (13-15). Then, as Kumar Das postulates, the colonial process proceeded through postcolonial and cultural imperialism, but post-colonialism overcame them —***by resisting and subverting former colonizer. Hence, myth and history, landscape and language, self and other, [became] the ingredients of post-colonialism.*** (Kumar Das 2007,30).

As Blum has reported Chattered words, it is under postcolonialism that “nationalism lunched] its most powerful, creative, and historically significant project: to fashion a “modern” national culture that is nevertheless not western”(Blum 2007,37). As Blum defines it, it is a “two-step process” where they mixed the cultural and material accomplishments of the west together with their customs and tradition to “unify” and “legitimize” the change they opt for. To do so, they revived their native culture since it is a “timeless repository of national truth”. These attempts make the strategies of hybridization perfect, extend hybrid “national identity constructs”. (37) The attempt to adopt western ways also is a try to legitimize this change, and this, for Blum, is an “embarrassing degree of assimilation”, because by doing so they give up their national identity.

This seems to be a burden on postcolonial authors. As Tiffin notices, postcolonial writers want to abolish or “deconstruct” European identity, and their novels depict the implication of European domination over postcolonial societies, and to generate their identities. As argued in the essay entitled *Literature and Postcolonial Discourse*, “the text” may be seen as a symbol of nation and identity, and Eagleton thinks, if we consider this text as postcolonial, we would find that this symbolism could be viewed as an ideology of its own.

### **The Autotelic Self in Postcolonial Literature**

It is the ideology of self that Professor Mahaly Csikszentmihalyi has described as “the autotelic self-----a self that has self-contained goals”.(27) It is a self that fiercely asserts and guards the validity and integrity of her experience, validity and integrity that requires no other validation either morally, socially, or culturally. The epitome of this self is revealed most trenchantly in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, Kincaid’s *Lucy*, *Annie John*, *At the Bottom of the River* and George Lamming’s *In the Castle of my Skin*, to mention but a few. The protagonists of the listed authors appear to be autotelic personalities that reflect the characteristic image of postcolonial literature. In the context of a heterogeneous society, where the colonized often live with their former colonizers, postcolonial writers try to reassign new ethnic and cultural meanings to marginalized groups. Its literature attempts to construct new identities against these outwardly imposed borders.

Postcolonial literature knocks on the door of the colonized intending to commune with them. It aims at entering their inner sanctum and bringing into picture their cries of loss and their proclamations of birth. It is not a literature to show the colonized as the victims, but it shows their confused sense of belonging. They find themselves in cultural, racial and historical hybridity, which make them oscillate between

present and past. This oscillation can lead to poor meaningful communication. Through the postcolonial discourse colonial violence is understood as including as 'epistemic' aspect, which is an attack on the culture, ideas and value systems of the colonial peoples. Postcolonial discourse indicates a new way of thinking in which cultural, intellectual, economic or political processes are seen to work together in the formation, perpetuation and dismantling colonialism. Since Africa and Caribbean have been the focal point of the colonizing super powers under different pretexts, it has, with the passage of time, created a sense of disintegration and fragmentation within the African community and consequently given birth to a number of rebellious critical writers. Among the African writers Chinua Achebe's novels and essays have played crucial roles in the growth of postcolonial literature and indigenous knowledge systems. But these essays are primarily by-products of his creative practice which expressed itself in the novel form. It is a tribute to Achebe's art that the studies of his novels, as well as his own essays, are among the landmarks of the scholarship on African literature.

The demonstration here can be shown in one of the most prominent and outstanding articles, "The Novelist as a Teacher", published after his celebrity novel *Things Fall Apart*. Achebe, in this article, declared to be a committed and dedicated artist, whose pivotal responsibility as a black writer at that movement in Africa's evolution was, to save the African society from degradation and the hemiplegic attack on its social-cultural and historical values, he further claims that:

The writer's duty is to explore in depth the human condition; African people must know and value their heritage, understand their history and possess a strong ethical code that condemns injustice and corruption wherever they occur. In African case, therefore, novel and history are the same - the novel is history, it is a record of the history as Africans have seen and lived it. (P 24)

Achebe is not only a conscious voice but something more than that, who understands the duty of a writer in African society, a society which was going under a natural decline, affected by various influences of colonial past, a society which tries to stick to its religious beliefs and rituals in order not to fall apart.

The postcolonial writers bring into light the suppression of a vast wealth of indigenous cultures beneath the weight of imperial control. As Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, pertinently assert:

... All post-colonial societies are still subject in one way or another to overt or subtle forms of neo-

colonial domination, and independence has not solved this problem. The development of new élites within independent societies, often buttressed by neocolonial institutions; the development of internal divisions based on racial, linguistic or religious discriminations; the continuing unequal treatment of indigenous peoples in settler/invaser societies—all these testify to the fact that post-colonialism is a continuing process of resistance and reconstruction. (P.2)

One could concur that a colonized is bound to put up with the different disconcerting situations. He has to have high resistance and fortitude against lots of uncalled-for and inevitable conflicts.

In a region made ominously intelligible because of systems of domination, in which origins are obscured or degenerate into self-serving fictions, traumatized by dependency, the quest for autotelic self and redefinition is the only valid imaginative response of the writers of the postcolonial literature. The postcolonial writer is haunted by the darker implications of these polarities. His imagination is constantly drawn to these contrastive mental spaces, which symbolically reflect the relationship between power and the promise of its subversion. The individual artist's unsettling focus on these precarious dichotomies ultimately constitutes a tradition built around redefining the subject, reacting against cultural and psychological estrangement, and in its most visionary manifestation, creating a poetics of speaking voice, and establishing a defiant and autotelic personality.

### **Multicultural, Hybridity and Migration**

The new generation of postcolonial writers faces the problem of identifying itself culturally unlike the first generation. For, according to B.T. Williams, this new generation attempts to write beyond borders and constructs its cultural identity basing itself on the basis that it has no “clear sense of home”, their writings keep on wandering from one place to another giving us the feeling that they are displaced, or that they live in nowhere. As Sunetra Gupta puts it:

I think one has to be comfortable with the notion that one has one's own cultural identity and that one hasn't necessarily to be at —home, so to speak. [...] I think we have to accept that we are going to be perpetually wandering. I mean we can't be at home. Even if we sit at home, we are forced to travel just because of what is going on around us. [Sunetra Gupta (interview)]. (B.T. Williams, Juvert 1999).

This generation of writers (and the one preceding it) has been given different labels such as: Black-British writers, African-American writers, or Maghreban writers. This kind of labels, Williams adds, could be understood as a new way of marginalization towards migrants, or towards “those not recognized as part of the dominant culture’s discourse”.

This generation of writers, especially the migrant ones, try to produce a literature which is neither different nor assimilative to the literature of the center. Their attempt is aimed at the hybridization of the universal discourse, and the claim that cultural identity now is in fact multicultural and flexible. For them identity has no limits, and can’t be defined by matters of borders; there are no such terms as center and periphery, or a dominator and a marginalized.

This generation of migrant writers has been divided by Mark Stain in his book *Black British Literature: Novels of Transformation* into two types; the “wind rush generation” to denote those writers who migrated in the 1940’s and 1950’s and began writing during that period; and the “post-wind rush generation” to refer to the generation of writers who were born in Britain (36). According to Andrew Smith, migration became a marker of the new world order, it is growing everyday, and it is the basic reason for the quick change that is going on in the world today. This mass migration has many reasons and these migrants who came from different backgrounds have different reasons to migrate and go through different experiences. This migration started with the rush for power, or imperialism, and has affected local literatures, which has forcibly, because of colonization and cross- culturalism, become multicultural, or universal.

With the beginning of imperialism, many Europeans travelled to Africa and Asia. These travelers wrote about their experiences there, and drew a picture of these continents in the minds of their peoples. They had written accounts about the traditions and values of these places making them seem savage and uncivilized, and planting the idea of the superiority of Europeans over other races.

These travel writings has shaped the European governments as civilizing powers through their colonizing process, or as Smith calls it: “humanitarian intervention”. Consequently, many writers began writing against colonization and against European powers, thus presenting a new kind of literature and a new type of readership to the world. This lead to an ongoing interest in the way a distant writing about a specific social and cultural experience may influence culturally different societies.

In the twentieth century, one can notice the growth, both in number and in importance, of —*figures who address the metropolis using the techniques, the discourses, the very weapons of scholarship and criticism once reserved exclusively for the European, now adapted for insurgency or revisionism at the very heart of the Western centre* [Said 1990: 29]” (cited in N. Lazarus 2004: 244). But still, many writers still opt for the idea that Western culture and civilization are pure. But with the mass migration, and the prominence of migrant writers, the claims that the identity of a person is not bound to his culture, race or ethnicity have taken place. As Smith adds: “At the very least it is clear that we can no longer hold comfortably on to the notion of a closed national culture, complete within and for itself” (Lazarus 2004: 245).

Out of this idea, postcolonial scholars hold the claim that; with the movement of people towards many places, logically the cultural centre moves into many directions, and is not static and specific to one society and one culture as some writers claim. So, migration has changed the world’s static perception, and brought the notion of mixing cultures to form hybrid literary and cultural works that seem to be present in many places and periods at the same time.

One of the roles of the migrant writer in postcolonial literature could be to uncover what Smith calls “the protected arenas of national culture” through talking about their history and their native people’s experiences of all kinds. Thus, the mobility option that migrants enjoy helps them produce works free of censorship and state control; and far away from borders and linearity that many other writers are bound with. They are free, boundless, and limitless and they have no one-sided view of the world around them. However, and as Smith thinks, the people of the world conceive this notion of migration in different ways; some see it as a liberating experience and a domination factor since it has a price like any other merchandise in the world, while others see it as a terrible choice to take. Still, the works of a migrant writer are seen as fluid through exploring the other world and introducing the native culture and thought to the other. Or in Smith’s words: [...] *migrancy becomes [...] a name for how we exist and understand ourselves in the twenty-first century* (Lazarus 2004: 247).

Besides, migrant works are limitless, fluid and free of linearity; their works are explorative and broader in perspective since they mix different cultures and social values. Their works are free of censorship and transcend national borders and limits. This idea could be backed up with what Homi Bhabha said: “[...] there is “no necessary or eternal belongingness” (Bhabha 1994: 179)” (cited in Lazarus 2004: 248). For, he rejects such dichotomies as local/migrant, and the idea of cultural purity, since he thinks that the so called “cultural difference” that

divides and distinguishes between societies is in fact nonexistent; and he assumes that identities, no matters how different they are, are implicated in each other.

So; migration constitutes one of the central interests of postcolonial studies since it brought into being a new way and a different perspective to view identity. The question of identity, as studied by postcolonial scholars, is no more bound to questions of nationality or ethnicity; as imperialism and displacement has lead to the emergence of this new category of people who mix a variety of cultures and traditions, and who changed the notion of belonging to force the introduction of a new concept to the world: that of hybridity.

Migration has created a new way to view identity, and has contributed to making identity a crucial theme in postcolonial literature (242-248). For, the crisis of identity in postcolonial societies, as the editors of *The Empire Writes Back* pointed out, comes out of the tight link between the place and the self. The mass migration caused by colonization and after colonization periods, deliberate or undesired, hinders the sense of self; and by undesired or forced migration we mean slavery.

These migrants have been appropriated a sense of inferiority and lost their self-esteem; they have lost their cultural pride to and because of the so-called dominant cultures or the centre. They have been inserted the feeling that they are always the other in their homelands or in the others' lands. (8-9)

In addition to that, we have the notion of hybridity which most of the postcolonial writers deal with in their works, since not only migrant suffer from this dilemma but also people in their own homelands. So, postcolonial literature, as Andrew Hammond asserted, made of this notion of hybridity a very crucial one in its context, as it deals with picturing out how the postcolonial subjects hold their original practices together with imperial ones. This notion raises other important elements in the forging of postcolonial identities like the notion of Otherness. (222).

It is however claimed by Lars Eckstein that this "postcolonial hybridity" does nothing but privileging the colonial centre in a way or another. Since it injects the idea that only literatures that criticize and challenge the Western cannon deserve merit, whereas literature that investigates African or Asian modernity are given a minimized attention. This hybridity in literary texts comes out of the transcultural contact that postcolonial writers hold with the West. It is the way postcolonial literature employs multicultural traditions, religions, and ideologies in its texts to show the multicultural hybrid feature of its societies. (23)

So, as Nayar postulated, not only migrants are hybrid people. Postcolonial literature strives to hyphenate the notion that natives also became hybrid because of the process of colonization which has affected their identities. This encounter with the colonizer have eliminated the existing identity and replaced it with a new one. In addition, the experience of colonization had led to the existing feature of multiculturalty in the postcolonial societies, since these latter ones have been implanted another language besides their native one, new cultures and beliefs and new traditions.

The fact that they want to create a space where they can reconcile their original identity and their newly forged identity is thus a quest that is strongly present through the postcolonial fiction. Writers such as Ngugi Wa Thiong'o attempt to depict that hybrid nature but at the same time they attempt to find solutions to avoid this hybridity and multuculturalty through their characters and regain an "authentic identity", a quest which seems quiet impossible with the demands of the modern world we live in today, this world which notices a lively mobility of people which interact with each other and give it its hybrid multicultural feature.

### **Conclusion**

One could concur that a colonized mind could put up any assuring weapon to resist his colonizer's antics. The ancestry of postcolonial criticism and theory can be traced to Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*, both published in French in 1952, and 1961 respectively. Fanon was a Martinique-born black psychiatrist and anti-colonialist intellectual who wrote from the perspective of a colonial subject in the thick of decolonization, addressing other colonial subjects. He placed the cultural aspect of colonial and postcolonial history at the centre of his discussion. Various anti-colonial theories have influenced the oppressed peoples of the world; but *The Wretched of the Earth* has articulated more effectively, profoundly and lastingly than any other anti-colonial work on behalf of and to the colonized.

In Bhabha's own terms: "colonial discourse produces the colonized as a social reality which is at once an 'other' and yet entirely knowable and visible" (101). According to Bhabha, 'hybridity' is a kind of negotiation between the colonizer and the colonized.

He seems to stress the idea that both the colonizer and the colonized are interdependent, both politically and culturally. His concept of 'otherness' is derived from Lacan's 'Other' and Fanon's idea of 'Other' as binary opposition between the White and the Black.

Postcolonial studies often involve a prolonged engagement with issues such as terrain, people and their relationships, wealth, power and its resistance, historical continuity and change, representation and culture, knowledge and its construction. Though post colonialism is 'the discourse of the colonized' as described by Ashcroft, it has the potential to assemble new communities with political and ethical commitment to challenging and questioning the practices of domination and subjugation. Theories of colonial discourses play a very influential role in the development of post colonialism. They explore how representations and modes of perception are used as fundamental weapons of colonial power to keep the colonized subservient to them. Colonialism creates the notion in the mind of the colonized that it is their birth right to rule over other peoples and there is a deliberate process of colonizing the mind. They do it by persuading the colonized to accept and internalize its logic and speak its language. It is obviously established that postcolonial literary theory evolved as a literary interpretation of the growing postcolonial theorization of the late 60's and 70's. Literary texts were therefore analyzed based on ethno-historical tools for deciphering the dialects of cultural forms and politics of power, colonialism and apartheid.

### **Summary**

The postcolonial literatures, when looked at from within their own perspectives, however, do not justify colonial entrapment, racism, subjugation and irrational inclinations. Despite Caliban's transformation by postcolonial writers such as Chinua Achebe, Frantz Fanon, Aime Cesaire, George Lamming, Jamaica Kincaid to mention but a few, Caliban remains an ambiguous symbol for the autotelic self of the colonized. Active self-formation or 'autotelic self', is a major concern of postcolonial literature.

### **Tutor Marked Assignment**

1. What is the relevance and substitute of postcolonial theory in colonial literature?
2. Discuss the background of postcolonial literature using prominent theorists of postcolonial theory in your discourse.
3. What are the critical approaches to appreciating and analyzing postcolonial literary texts? Discuss elaborately
4. The autotelic self is a special self of its kind. Discuss this type of self using any Caribbean protagonist character of your choice to buttress your points explicitly.
5. Justify or contradict postcolonial theory as an assuring weaponry of a colonized mind.

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## **MODULE 5: POSTCOLONIAL FEMINIST IDENTITY: AN AESTHETIC MODEL FOR AFRICAN-AMERICAN & CARIBBEAN WOMEN WORKS**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This module aims at introducing Postcolonial feminist theory as a theory that is primarily concerned with the representation of women in once colonized countries and in Western locations. It concentrates on construction of gender difference in colonial and anti-colonial discourses, representation of women in anti-colonial and postcolonial discourses with particular reference to the work of women writers. The postcolonial feminist critics raise a number of conceptual, methodological and political problems involved in the study of representation of gender. At the end of this unit (module) it is expected that the students should be able to understand and distinguish between postcolonial theory and postcolonial feminist theory.

### **Objectives**

The objectives of this segment is to make the students see that postcolonial feminist critics raise a number of conceptual, methodological and political problems involved in the study of representation of gender. She has to resist the control of colonial power not only as a colonized subject, but also as a woman. In this oppression her colonized brother is no longer her accomplice, but her oppressor. In his struggle against the colonizer, he even exploits her by misrepresenting her in the nationalist discourses.

### **Main Content**

Postcolonial feminism emerged in response to colonialism and the Eurocentric view of feminism and women. Postcolonial feminism rejects the idea of oppression against women being universal and instead encourages us to take a feminist intersectional approach towards the issues. The division of first world and third world feminism allows third world women to critique the way in which first world feminism tended to generalize women and oppression of them as a whole, not taking into consideration economic, geographical and historical differences.

John McLeod writes in *Beginning Postcolonialism* that the term "first world" feminism should be seen as useful when looking at problems and possibilities of using first world feminism in a colonial context (200). Postcolonial theory is about the third world woman taking back agency and re-writing the history from which they were excluded. The main idea is for the women who were formerly colonized to be able to critique the ways that colonized women of colonialism were re-produced or made invisible by colonialism and patriarchy. Caribbean postcolonial feminism in literature has since the rise of the Caribbean woman writer

dealt with issues of the de-centering of the male subject, the symbol of the Caribbean mother and the subject formation of the individual in a colonized context.

Postcolonial feminist theory is primarily concerned with the representation of women in once colonized countries and in Western locations. It concentrates on construction of gender difference in colonial and anti-colonial discourses, representation of women in anti-colonial and postcolonial discourses with particular reference to the work of women writers. The postcolonial feminist critics raise a number of conceptual, methodological and political problems involved in the study of representation of gender.

While postcolonial theorist struggles against the maiden colonial discourse that aims at misrepresenting him as inferior, the task of a postcolonial feminist is far more complicated. She suffers from “double colonization” (a term coined by Kirsten Holst Peterson and Anna Rutherford and refers to the ways in which women have simultaneously experienced the oppression of colonialism and patriarchy). She has to resist the control of colonial power not only as a colonized subject, but also as a woman. In this oppression her colonized brother is no longer her accomplice, but her oppressor. In his struggle against the colonizer, he even exploits her by misrepresenting her in the nationalist discourses. Not only that, she also suffers at the hands of Western feminists from the colonizer countries who misrepresent their colonized counterparts by imposing silence on their racial, cultural, social, and political specificities, and in so doing, act as potential oppressors of their ‘sisters’. In this article, I explore these challenges of a postcolonial feminist, for it is in her struggle against the ‘postcolonial’ and ‘feminist’ theorists that she can assert her identity as a ‘postcolonial feminist subject rather object self’.

Postcolonial feminist theory exerts a pressure on mainstream postcolonial theory in its constant iteration of the necessity to consider gender issues. Post colonialism and feminism have come to share a tense relationship as some feminist critics point out that postcolonial theory is a male-centered field that has not only excluded the concerns of women, but also exploited them. Postcolonial feminist theorists have accused postcolonial theorists not only of obliterating the role of women from the struggle for independence, but also of misrepresenting them in the nationalist discourses. Edward Said’s seminal study *Orientalism* itself accorded little attention to female agency and discussed very few female writers. Homi K. Bhabha’s work on the ambivalence of colonial discourses explores the relationship between a ‘colonizing’ subject and a ‘colonized’ object without reference to how the specifics of gender might complicate his model. Critics such as Carole Boyce Davies who

are suspicious of the male-centered bias of postcolonial critique often ask “where are the women in the theorizing of post coloniality?” (80).’ The necessity for relief functions as one of the most powerful weapons for resisting colonialism, and for establishing the space of a postcolonial identity.

Undeniably, the findings of postcolonial feminist theory formed an important framing and structural apparatus that illuminated the inner life of African-American & Caribbean protagonists. This being the case, after the initial attempts to bring postcolonial feminist theory to bear on black literary works, their works found itself under the nationalist critical trend and its preoccupation with the search for national and cultural identity and with the foundation of national tradition that was supposed to offset imperialism. Nationalistic and cultural critics enquired in what ways the black literary works have anchored the imaginative re-workings of mother/daughter tensions within the culture of their homeland is worth considering closely. For instance, Jamaica Kincaid’s reading concentrated not so much on the psychic development of the girl-child or the acquisition of appropriate gender roles, as on how Kincaid imaginatively combined the theme of the daughter’s resistance to the mother with the theme of her resistance to the colonial culture.

This research agrees with McClintock’s affirmation that ‘the global militarization of masculinity and the feminization of poverty have thus ensured that women and men do not live ‘post-coloniality’ in the same way, or share the same singular ‘post-colonial condition(634)’.

Postcolonial feminism is primarily concerned with the representation of women in once colonized countries and in western locations. When applied to literary studies, Helen Tiffin, Helen Gilbert and George Lamming, interpret postcolonial texts to discover and understand the situations and experiences of women that keep them at the mercy of patriarchy.

I explore these struggles of a postcolonial feminist such as, Alice Walker, Audre Lorde, Jamaica Kincaid, Gloria Naylor, to mention but a few, survived because their struggle for the postcolonial and feminist theorists stand an enduring chance of re-inventing a strong sense of selfhood.

### **Time, Change and Women**

To explore the origin of feminism it is important that one notes the changes that greatly affected the development of the female within the social sphere. The past social roles for both men and women remain subconsciously imbedded within our modern construct of the world. We find it humanely reasonable that there are simply things that men are

designed to do while leaving other responsibilities to females. The ambiguity here is founded on the precipice that this construct did not always exist.

Historians offer evidence of the many ways in which women were not second class when compared with men. In her book *No Turning Back: The History of Feminism and the Future of Women*, Estelle B. Freedman begins her discussion of feminism by noting historical accounts of women working outside the dated female paradigms. For instance, she relates how pre-colonial Africa women took part in more than the upkeep of the home. Women worked the land alongside men. The ability of the women to assist in the production of food “represented a form of wealth” (Freedman 26).

Despite the fact that the social makeup did not look as our society does today, this proves that there was a sense of shared responsibility and power among men and women within old societies. Women within a myriad of cultural contexts could own property, run businesses, work as clergy, farm, and take charge of the home still, this power was not universally spread across the globe. This may be evidenced by examining women in old Asian culture. Women in China were like many others in Asia who found themselves bound from birth. As queer as it seems, women were not universally bound around the world. How then did seemingly all women find themselves equally stripped of power and designated as second class beside their male counterparts?

One may place blame here to the rise of imperialism and with it, the spread of European ideals throughout the world as colonialism took root. Thus women who were in power found themselves lacking while women who had no power to begin with found themselves in greater captivity. Freedman explains: “The world before feminism offers ample evidence that men had more power than women... listen to folk wisdom or read sacred texts, we learn about the virtues of sons and the lesser values of daughters” (18). A closer examination sheds further light on the need for feminism. There are numerous old proverbs and colloquial sayings that negatively reference women. A Zulu quote notes: “A girl is merely a weed” (Qtd. in Freedman 19). While a Dutch proverb reads: “a house full of daughters is like a cellar full of sour beer” (Qtd. in Freedman 19).

Upon examining Asian culture, one may find many quotes about women including this one referenced by Freedman: “a girl lets you down twice, once at birth and the second time when she marries” (19). Such ideological references to women strangely coincide with religious precepts, which placed the woman below the male. Exulted scientist and evolutionist Darwin added to the stripping of the female’s persona as he

sought to use science to prove the superiority of the male over female, including even male species of animals to further drive the point. Women, caught between the proverbially rock and a hard place, had the choice of accepting their marginalization; instead they used the few tools to break down the previously established barriers.

Freedman explains one of the by-products of imperialism was the availability of education. Again, just as colonialism may be traced back to Europe, one may trace the roots of the enlightened female to there. Pioneers like Mary Astell and Mary Wollstonecraft would help to empower a new generation of women, or more appropriately, feminists. In their wake, the new feminists would make strides in declaring the rights of other women like them. These women would go on to acquire equal access to education, political power, and financial stability while reconstructing the definition of womanhood.

Ironically, the procurement of privileged European descended women did not include other women. To an extent, less privileged women were excluded; furthermore, we discover that women of color were usually not included within these new feminist models. The famous words of pioneering feminist Sojourner.

Truth saying: "Ain't I a woman?" is indicative of a shift in time and the burgeoning changes occurring for women. Sadly, many of these changes brought to question the aforementioned question posed by sojourner truth. Women were making significant changes, yet these changes did not readily apply to women of color who found again that they were different; this time they were simply different by the supposed genetic differences that made them racially inferior.

### **Feminism and the Black Woman**

Modern culture thrives on its ability to provide multiple outlets. Whether one is searching for a particular type of movie, artistically styled music, or fashion apparel item, one will find that there are a plethora of choices. Within the realm of the literature there are multiple genres as well as multiple methods of study, and for that matter, multiple methods of criticism. Writings by women usually have often fallen in line together as they must constantly fight the hegemonic ideals floating throughout the established literary canon.

These works by women must stand the coming onslaught of a traditionally male canon and its proponents who act as skilled surgeons, entering the bodies of work created by women and dissecting them. The slightest indication is all that is required before the surgeon passes judgment: if the work is careful to abide by the largely patriarchal tenets of the literary canon, it receives a clean bill of health. Fortunately, there

is help for those works upon which the surgeon finds diseases spread by Amazonian calls of sisterhood. The application of literary theories derived from established feminist theories allow such works to receive a second opinion of sorts and in many cases, the works may find that the second opinion provides a method for validation they would otherwise not have. Such theories have been protective of a base, which consists largely of white females.

Women of color, and for this matter Black women, are left without a second opinion and thus, their works are usually dismissed or excluded for portraying the realities of black women, which may not coincide with the lived existence of whites.

Neville and Hamer explain the need to develop a new niche within feminism or feministic literary criticism that is inclusive to black women as well as women of color. Their “Revolutionary Black Feminism” theory helps to align works that would, otherwise, be excluded from the protection provided by feminism; instead its choice for inclusion is derived from the very qualities that general feminist theories would use to support exclusion. The women note that their purpose “is to address the gaps in the literature” (438). The gaps, mentioned here are likely the result of a lack of true development in the areas associated with the theoretical development of black feminism. Meaning: current models of feminism, even those which include black women, fail to bolster their work. The “introduction” of Revolutionary Black Feminism by Neville and Hamer revolves around the following tenets: Revolutionary Vision is Dynamic; Racial, Gender, and Sexual Oppression are reconfigured within periods of capitalist restructuring; and Oppression consists of structural and ideological components.

The first tenets is about how dynamism is rooted ideally in the belief that change is inevitable. Thus, as things inevitably change, so, too, must precepts within any ideological constructs. Therefore, Revolutionary Black Feminism, as proposed by Neville and Hamer, will grow and change with its audience. It will not require that those it seeks to protect change to fit its mold. However, the dynamic mechanisms at play will not admonish those things, which remain constant. As evidence, Neville and Hamer note the sexual abuse instigated by white slave owners, which has strangely continued to remain a trend in modern society as they note “the overwhelming majority of sexual assaults in the United States are intraracial” (439). Therefore, a work like *Their Eyes Were Watching God* would not supercede or negate a work such as Naylor’s *The Women of Brewster Place*. Despite their differences, the works would be accepted on the basis that they illustrate different points.

Neville and Hamer's second tenet argument begins profoundly by stating: "Black women's experiences are, in part, shaped by a myriad of interlocking systems of oppressions that are framed within the context of the political economy of a given society" (440); that is to say, capitalism molds the experiences of those whom it affects. Thus there is no question that black women are affected on dual levels: first directly, and secondly by black males. To an extent, children (especially black children) are affected by their disproportional placement at the bottom of the global capitalistic scale. The characters Claudia, Freida, and Pecola of Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, offer examples of life for children of color who find that their father has been beaten by society, and in turn he beats his wife who thus reigns power over her children.

The third tenet proposes that we remain in touch with the social structures within a postcolonial society. It is, after all, the multiple levels within society that provide a variance in the experiences of women. This truth is evident for black women as well. Women at the bottom of the societal structure are often affected the most, while women at the middle or the top find that there are certain areas for which they have been granted immunity; they remain untouched by plights which women at the bottom attend as if they were normal.

The tenets proposed by Neville and Hamer are adept in their inclusion of specific intricacies that other methods of feminism have failed to include. Although their work is not an end all solution, it does highlight the occasional or situational problems with general feminism, which begs the question: what elements of feminism should remain as they are without excluding women of color?

### **Womanism and Identity in African-American & Caribbean Literature**

The term womanism was coined by Alice Walker in her collection of essays titled *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1983). Womanism sums up the aesthetics of black female literary experience. According to Julia Hare quoted by Hudson Weems (1998:1812), "women who are calling themselves black feminists need another word to describe what their concerns are ....Women of African descent who embrace feminism do so because of the absence of a suitable existing framework for their individual needs as African women."

According to Alice Walker (1983: xi - xii), a womanist is:

A black feminist or feminist of color... A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or non sexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as a

natural counterbalance of laughter), and women's strength. Sometimes loves individual men sexually and/or non- sexually, committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist, except periodically for health. Traditionally universalist. Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. Loves the spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. Loves the folk. Loves herself. Regardless: Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender.

The term womanism was also used by Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi in 1985 to describe the African female experience. Ogunyemi, as quoted by Mary Kolawole (1997:24), defines womanism as “a philosophy that celebrates Black roots, the ideal of Black life, while giving a balanced presentation of Black womanism. It concerns itself as much with the Black sexual power tussle as with the world power structure that subjugates Blacks.” African -Americans in advocating womanism as a black outgrowth of feminism, present womanism as a global ideology that defines the experiences of blacks in the Diasporas, as well as, those residing in the continent. The use of the term black is somehow elastic. Some critics have applied the term black to mean all those people who are nonwhite by descent. Such people may be black Africans or not. Womanism as an alternative theory is distinguished by its focus on the black female experience. Benard Bell (1987: 242) observes that the preoccupations of African American female writers include:

Motifs of interlocking racist, sexist and classist oppression, black female protagonists, spiritual journeys from victimization to the realization of personal autonomy or creativity, a centrality of female bonding or networking, a sharp focus on personal relationships in the family and community, deeper, more detailed explorations and validation of their epistemological powers of emotions, iconography of women's clothing and black female language.

Three things are central to womanist writings. They include racial issues, classist issues and sexist issues. These are not central to feminist writings. Bell Hooks (1998: 1845) insists that “racism abounds in the writings of white feminists reinforcing white supremacy and negating the possibility that women will bond politically across ethnic and racial boundaries.”

To womanist writers, racial and classist oppression are inseparable from sexist oppression. Many womanist writers even portray racial and

classist oppression as having precedence over sexist oppression. This is because the womanists believe that the emancipation of black women folk cannot be achieved apart from the emancipation of the whole race. Womanists therefore believe in partnership with their menfolk. This characteristic distinguishes womanism from feminism which is mainly a separatist ideology.

### **Audre Lorde: An Archetypal Womanist**

Audre Geraldine Lorde, a black feminist/womanist writer, not only presents the quest for female voice and subjectivity but redefines womanhood in one of her literary works, *The Black Unicorn* (1978), a collection of poems. In this volume she attempts to redefine womanism and the black feminine self. To her, the black feminist is not like the Anglo-woman, the woman is not a weaker sex here but a warrior, a fighter and when she talks people pay attention. That is the reason why Lorde dresses like Africans, putting on African big head-tie (gelé) and she is popularly known as the warrior poet and a lesbian feminist writer of colour. She is called warrior poet because after visiting West Africa; she says, 'I have found out something – I have found it. I don't need to look up to United States to define a woman.' She defines a woman from the African concepts because to her in Africa women are warriors.

One of the recurrent themes of women's poetry and fiction is the rejection of traditional phallo-centred (men-centred) values. For instance a male child is more important than a female child, and the subsequent search of alternate description of reality which affirms female experience, to look for a way to tell their women stories without depending on the values that suppress women existence. Phallo is the male organ (penis) and men have been using the possession of their male organ to value themselves more than women, saying that they are more powerful and superior but Lorde asserts that possession of the male organ is nothing. It is just the brain washing of women's psyche centuries ago.

Therefore, one of the recurrent themes that one finds in Audre Lorde's poems and fiction is that she writes the bible of Lesbian Feminism that is used all over the world. She invents black lesbianism. Audre Lorde joins other feminist poets to explore the ways in which the dominant discourse (male discourse) silences women.

Contemporary feminist writers including Audre Lorde have demonstrated the vital link or connection between narrative control and self-realization. For them if one can control one's own stories, she realizes herself. To realize the female self nobody has to tell her story. Men who present women as the weaker sex (suppress women) are not to tell women's stories. In her poem 'The women of Dan with swords in

their hands to mark the time when they were warriors', she presents women as warriors and not as the weaker sex the whites presented them.

### **Developing a new Multicultural Feminism Model**

As changes have surfaced within the global community perhaps now is the time to begin the true development of a new multicultural feminism. A key argument of this presented research stems from the proposal to create and define a new multicultural feminism. Steps toward defining multicultural feminism are not entirely indistinct. There has been previous scholarship, which not only supports the development of multicultural feminism, it seeks to explain how the initial groundwork is already in place. Becky Thompson's article "Multiracial Feminism: Recasting the Chronology of Second Wave Feminism" discusses the next step in casting literary feminism outside that of the previously mentioned hegemonic feminism. Thompson reiterates the claims that hegemonic feminism "is white led, marginalizes the activism and the world views of women of color, focuses mainly on the United States, and treats sexism as the ultimate oppression"(337). Within her body of research, Thompson explicates the rise of an international movement dating back to the 1970's. Essentially, it is this movement that began early to unite women from multiple ethnic backgrounds with antiracist whites. Accordingly, white women may not have realized that their quest to unite was built upon a psychological construct of inherited white privilege. Thus, they had been privileged in many ways due to the fact that they were white, and could not always understand the peculiarities associated with being a minority.

Thompson's research is careful in its reminder that the development of a new multi-racial feminism is inclusive to all women. This may however contrast with direct protestations to define ethnic modes of feminism, and to a degree, feministic literary criticism. This would include the likes of Alice Walker's womanist theory. A theory built upon the very idea that the lived experiences of black women make them different from other women. Essentially, Walker is not wrong here. It would seem that if women are to truly unite under a new feminism model, one must first learn to appreciate the specific peculiarities created by ethnic differences without using those differences to create a divisive wall. The development of a new model would therefore find the many commonalities between the lived experiences of all women. Prudently, I would like to make a note here of three key commonalities shared amongst all women.

### **All Women Suffer from Societal Oppression**

No matter what background a woman comes from, she is, from birth, oppressed by the very factors upon which her birth negates. The female sphere is designed and constructed by patriarchal forces that extend

natural authority to males. In the case of black women (as well as women of color), their male counterparts, though seemingly stripped of any power within the world are given authority over their women. Consequently, a woman must maneuver the social sphere by first overcoming the genetic defects associated with her birth as a female. This would include any of the unique features inherent to being a female: sensitivity, compassion, beauty (male proposed), understanding, and mothering. A woman must know her place or else she may find herself reprimanded or punished for her actions. The act of silencing is another method of oppression that also seeks to punish women. Women, like children, should be seen and not heard right?

### **All Women Have Been Abused**

The lived experiences of black women are decorously noted by recurring bouts of abuse. However, more often than not the abuse of white women has largely been left unexplored or discussed to the same degree that other women have been. Whereas blacks and other women of color have been vocal about the forms of abuse for which they have suffered, white women's stories of abuse are no less prevalent. The forms by which the abuse takes place may be different, yet that does not dispel the fact that some form of abuse occurs. If one is oppressed, then they are consequently abused. In this fashion, women are again united by the common association of their experience with abuse, physical and/or psychological but essentially abuse.

### **Women Work Harder than Men to Establish Place**

The act of establishing place in the world is fundamental step in one's psychological maturation. Women, who are again born outside the privilege of manhood, must exert greater effort in establishing place within society. Naturally men have a genetic advantage as that the subconscious mantras that permeate the existence of life are generally male. Thus, a male finds the world a place where they must make their mark while women are immediately confronted with the problem of knowing where they can make their mark. The world itself remains largely the realm of the patriarch; furthermore, it is through the manipulation of usually masculine principles that one achieves success and contentment in the world. Female's therefore must find their way in world wherein they simply act as accents, decorative pieces in the world's living room of man.

### **Conclusion**

By examining the account of shared commonalities between the lived experiences of all women it should therefore seem unquestionable that there exists a divided front within the realm of feminism, and to a lesser extent feminist criticism.

The established models of feminism have become outdated in a globalized world. Colonialism has touched everyone. Literature, alone, provides a firm testament to the lives of women. Black women, as well as other women of color have been affected differently, yet it does not override the fact that all women have been affected. Perhaps time will be the deciding factor in bringing together a truly united front that does not separate the Celie's and Nora's of the world. Instead one will finally acknowledge that they are all women and equally included and protected by a united multicultural feministic front.

### **Summary**

On multiple levels all women have been oppressed. Despite the varied effects of that oppression on women of color, and to a degree, black woman, the oppression has had the same effect of pushing women to the point where they must go above and beyond in order to counter the attempts to silence and marginalize them. The silencing and marginalization that has occurred among women-despite changing conditions-continues to present a problematic situation.

Black women, and for that matter women of color, have come a long way in their journey to find not only acceptance but also to define a space that has been long denied to them. The battle lines created by the threats of imperialism, canonization and sexism may have blurred yet the existent problems have yet to dissipate.

### **Tutor Marked Assignment**

1. What is the essence of postcolonial feminism especially in Black women writing? Elucidate profusely.
2. Is postcolonial feminist theory worth sustaining the relegation and negligence of a black woman or women in general in a contemporary world? Justify or contradict.
3. How would you reconcile time, change and women in their overwhelming pursuit of independence and identity in comparative black literature?
4. What is womanism? And how has it helped in projecting the image and identity of African-American and Caribbean women?
5. Discuss the idea of developing and establishing a new multicultural feminist model as sustenance to women in contemporary world.

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## **MODULE 6: REPRESENTATIONS OF BLACK WOMANHOOD IN AFRICAN-AMERICAN & CARIBBEAN LITERARY REALISM**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This segment aims at introducing the students to the suppressions and negations of both, white feminism and black liberation and their discursive constructions of subjectivity, agency and a potential for resistance, through the writings by black women. Their profuse representative writings had created a powerful moment of social and cultural awareness which reverberates - even though in many contexts rather as an underground existence - until today and has been resurfacing in the contemporary interest in and attraction of theories of intersectionality.

However, despite the noticeable current regard for the crossroads or interconnected axes of analysis framed by race, class, gender and sexuality though, the particular generative power of black women's writing as the crucial impulse to that critical development has, beyond the African-American & Caribbean context, gone missing. With a selection of contemporary criticism, this issue of gender forum wants to draw attention to the manifold contributions of black women's writing both to a cosmopolitan literary and cultural heritage of women, as well as to international gender studies.

### **Objectives**

The objectives of this segment are to make the students see that female writers continue to remind us of the differences between themselves and males and the separate struggles they face. For a woman, the task of liberation through writing must include also a thrash against the establishment created by male power, in this case, white-male power. Writings by women must be successful in relaying the unique female experience; one unlike that of their male counterparts. However, the works by women of color are constantly attacked and often dismissed as feministic, sexist, one-sided and the like. Fortunately, this has not discouraged the female "voice" from emerging. Writers such as Alice Walker, Zora Neale Hurston, Toni Morrison, Jamaica Kincaid, Audre Lorde and countless others have created a new space for the discussion of the female experience within postcolonial feminist setting.

### **Main Content**

Black feminists operating in literary collectives from 1979 to 1990 stole the key term "motherhood" out of its heteronormativized function and instead used it to create a cultural politics of presence which both frames the political practice of black feminist publishing and scholarship in the 1980's and provides a framework for how black feminist scholars,

writers and publishers today can engage a legacy that will still be in the making.

Katharina Gerund examines the impact of Audre Lorde's work as writer/activist on the development of Afro-German women's communities. Her essay analyzes transatlantic dialogues and interactions, which are primarily based on gender and black solidarity and outlines Lorde's seminal role for Afro-German women as well as the meaning of Lorde's work in Germany within the context of the African Diaspora.

To this end, therefore, black women's writing is characterized by expressive multiplicity in three major ways: intertextuality, intergeneric textual strategies and the collective first person. Despite feted single-author publications by individual black women, it was the anthology, a collective expression of black womanhood as in the form of *I and I*, which ushered in the idea of black women writers as a discrete politicized and aesthetic phenomenon. The black women's writings project the aesthetics of renaissance, identity, selfhood and rediscovery in women thereby acting as both an institutionalizing platform and a metaphor of "the black woman" the anthology embodies and encourages the formation of a collective subjectivity.

### **Phillis Wheatley & Zora Neale Hurston**

To begin a discussion of the plight of African American female writers it is not only easy but important to begin with the first African to have his or her works published in America: Phillis Wheatley. Wheatley, whose reputation is only hindered by the sheer amount of criticism her work acquired upon its release acted as a precursor for what other women like her could expect. Furthermore, her life as a writer sheds light on the duality of literature by women of color. That is, the writing must be expressive and combative.

The preface of Phillis Wheatley's collection states: "The following Poems were written originally for the Amusement of the Author, as they were the products of her leisure Moments... As her Attempts in Poetry are now sent into the World, it is hoped the Critic will not severely censure their Defects". The preface goes on to humbly provide reasoning behind the creation of the collection and asks the reader to accept the collection with the understanding that the writer in question does not forward her writing as anything more than the leisurely productions of a young girl; however, Wheatley's writing would go on to provide proof of the African American's ability to handle the art of poetry.

According to the Norton Anthology of African American Literature, Wheatley's *Poems on Various Subjects* offers its reader several introductory documents designed to authenticate Phillis Wheatley and her poetry" (Gates & McKay 214).

Her writings became the method by which the masses learned to gauge literature created by people of color. Consequently, this collection would also place Wheatley at odds with protectors of the canon, as well as with critics who found it absurd to think that a black could have written an accepted piece of literature; furthermore, the individual in question was a black woman.

One of Wheatley's greatest critics would surface in Thomas Jefferson who is noted for stating: "Religion indeed has produced a Phyllis [sic] Wheatley [sic] but it could not produce a poet. The compositions published under her name are below the dignity of criticism" (Grimes). Jefferson is highly regarded for his outspoken criticism of Africans in America. For Jefferson, it was incomprehensible that Wheatley could genuinely furbish writings of meaning. In fact, her writings, though genuine, were nothing more than "mindless repetition and imitation, without being the product of intellect, of reflection" (Gates 45). Jefferson's disdain of Wheatley's poetry is likely due to abolitionists' arguments that African American Literature provided proof of the capability of the "Negro".

Thus, the "Negro", capable of mastering the arts, could be worth more than a simple laborer. Jefferson's thoughts alluded to the inferiority of the African mind and thus the inferiority of Wheatley and other slaves. Therefore, if one is to consider this, it is not so hard to realize that the general thoughts of this nature have been embedded into cultural thought pertaining to blacks or "Negroes". Furthermore, black women are targeted due to their placement below their black male counterparts. In his book *The Trials of Phillis Wheatley*, editor Henry Louis Gates, Jr. reexamines the "trials" of Phillis Wheatley, discussing the "misgivings" pertaining to Wheatley's published writings. Gates reveals through his discourse of Wheatley what other women of color have to look forward to when attempting to define their existence through their writings. Women of color must face conflicts outside their race as well as conflicts spurned within. They are often "Too black to be taken seriously by white critics in the eighteenth century Wheatley was now considered too white to interest black critics in the twentieth" (Gates 82).

Prolific African American writer Richard Wright, as quoted by Deena, places blame on Wheatley for "being at one with white culture" (Qtd. in Deena 20). Long regarded for his outspokenness, Wright dismisses

Wheatley's writings on the basis of her close relationships with whites; furthermore, he denounces the accreditation given to them. Thus, Wright falls in place alongside critics who denounce the writings of an individual due to their relationships with the racially other. One may consider this notion of Wright to be universal, that is, he would make the same claim if the writer were male.

Her poems are filled with references that inspire as well as those which ask her readers to question their views relative to Africans. Perhaps it is Jefferson, or more appropriately those in agreement with him, that prompted Wheatley's writing of her poem "On being brought from Africa to America". The poem reminds us that despite the differences of Africans was mercy that brought me from my pagan land" (line 1), there does exist a hope that they, too, may be considered acceptable in God's eye "Remember, Christians, Negroes, black as Cain,/ May be refin'd, and join th' angelic train" (lines 7-8). This mode of writing is a recurring theme for women of color through writing.

According to Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas and Laura Gillman, writings by black women work to create "alternative social imaginaries that represent a space where home and belongingness may be attained and self-determination realized" (528). In their article "Subverting Forced Identities, Violent Acts and Narrativity of Race: A Diasporic Analysis of Black Women's Radical Subjectivity in Three Novel Acts" Gillman and Thomas discuss the act of subversion through literature composed by African American female writers. They go on to assert that black female writers use this technique to fight oppression; moreover, they are then better able to define a space within their society that is homelike: providing security and a sense of "belongingness" (Thomas & Gillman 529). Yet, women of color inadvertently expose themselves through this process; making themselves and their writings vulnerable to the attack. In the case of Wheatley, the attack is forcefully strong. Wheatley's perception of the world and her predicament would have been quite rare. As a slave, she was seemingly unaffected by the harsh realities that many other Africans endured. Therefore, within her writing, one may note that there is not much literature which protests slavery. This has been considered by some, like Wright, as the crux upon which her work should be measured. However, as noted by Anne Applegate in her article "Phillis Wheatley: Her Critics and her Contribution", Wheatley was "the first Black American woman author to receive any recognition in the literary world. Unfortunately, she is too often remembered simply as an oddity" (125). Besides the criticism of her works, does the content, alone, provide Wheatley's legacy protection? Does the content merit inclusion in the traditional literary canon? Are they "ethnic" enough to obtain acceptance from others of her race? The aforementioned

questions relating to Wheatley are questions, which may be examined with any female writer of color.

### **Zora Neale Hurston**

The writings of Zora Neale Hurston are as diverse as they are quintessential in understanding the relationship between literature composed by women of color and the world. Of herself, Hurston notes: "I am not tragically colored. There is no great sorrow dammed up in my soul, nor lurking behind my eyes... I feel most colored when I am thrown against a sharp white background" (*Colored* 1031). Hurston is a woman whose literary legacy is defined by the idea that a black woman could demand a space in the world; furthermore, she asserts that the woman did not have to do so in fear of her race or femininity.

In perhaps her greatest literary accomplishment, Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* tells the story of one woman's journey to find the perfect union she witnesses among objects in nature. The central character, Janie is told an important lesson about the life of women by her grandmother, "So de white man throw down de load and tell de nigger man tuh pick it up. He pick it up because he have to but he don't tote it. He hand it to his women folks. De nigger woman is the mule uh de world so fur as Ah can see" (Hurston *Eyes* 14).

The text begins by a revelation of the differences between male and female perception of dreams. Unlike their male counterparts whose dreams sail forever on the horizon, women fashion a different reality.

According to the narrator; "women forget all those things they don't want to remember, and remember everything they don't want to forget. The dream is the truth then they act and do things accordingly" (Hurston *Eyes* 1). Through the life experiences of the protagonist Janie, one is able to view directly the life of the African American woman: the mule of the world.

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Hurstons novel most certainly is best discussed when one notes the protagonist’s goal to achieve natural harmony in her life; harmony she witnesses as a teenager while watching bee’s pollinate fruit blossoms. This achievement of harmony is perhaps the central focus of the work, as that Janie’s action from that moment is an effort to achieve that level of harmony. Janie’s journey takes her through two failed marriages, abuse, societal shame, and eventual happiness in a final marriage. By the work’s end, we find that Janie has come full circle.

She has achieved her oneness with nature and gained her own command of the far off horizon; her destiny “[pulling] it from around the waist of the world and [draping it] around her shoulders” (Hurstons *Eyes* 193). The life of Janie Crawford is a triumph. It indicates the indomitable spirit of the African American woman to survive. Priscilla Wald, in her article “Colored:

The Self-Authorized Language of Difference in Zora Neale Hurston” explains that Hurston’s writing exhibits a unique quality that allows her to “speak from the margins” (80). Referencing the fact that as both a woman and an African -American, Hurston inter-plays differences to “facilitate an inspection of cultural identity” (81). Unlike the journey of the black man, Hurston is female, and thus her identity is doubly indemnified by the problematic effects of post-colonialism.

At the time of its original publication, Hurston’s work became the center of an ambiguous debate. On one side were supporters, albeit some of which were white while on the other side were detractors, of which some were black. Like Wheatley who preceded her, Hurston found her writings battling against imperialistic ideals associated with race and culture as well as with sexist views of black men. In reference to the writings of Hurston, prolific African- American author Richard Wright is quoted for stating: “[Hurston’s novel] neither has a basic idea or theme that lends itself to a significant interpretation” (qtd. in Martinez). Wright’s comments are ratified by other African -American critics who disregard Hurston’s novel due to its sensual overtones as well as her emphasis on southern dialect. For all that he criticizes of Hurston;

Wright fails to create a proper portrayal of the black woman in any of his writings.

### **Alice Walker & Toni Morison**

Alice Walker, the best known African American writer of the second half of the twentieth century, wrote *The Color Purple* in 1982. Her writings turn to be a landmark in African American women's fiction and a turning point in women's career writing.

Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* has been praised as one of the greatest literary works of its time. By that same token, Walker's writing has been criticized for themes that include a negative portrayal of black men. Bell Hooks in his article "Writing the Subject: Reading the Color Purple" describes the work as it "broadens the scope of literary discourse, asserting its primacy in the realm of academic thought while simultaneously stirring the reflective consciousness of a mass audience" (215). Hooks notes that a key characteristic of the work is the sexual exploration of the main character: "Celie's life is presented in reference to her sexual history" (216). Yet, there is something deeper at work in Walker's novel that represents the real life displacement of women in regards to society.

The prominent female characters in Walker's work act as caricatures of women in society. Celie, the protagonist, is the young woman who comes of age in a world that resigns her as a subordinate to men, frames her as physically unattractive, and places her within a world that constantly reminds her that as a woman she is nothing. Through her experiences with the other women in the novel, who like Celie are themselves caricatures, she pieces together her own feminine identity within a largely male dominated world. Celie reveals the ugly, but very real existence of male bigotry. She also reveals conflicting ideas pertaining to Christian images of god: "He big and old and tall and gray-bearded and white" (Walker *Color* 195). It is Celie who learns to think outside the prescribed notions dictated by man and to seek god in everything. However, one the single caricature of Celie alone. Take for instance the indomitable Sophia. The caricature of Sophia is illustrated by her own admittance that she, along with her sisters, were all built like "Amazons". Celie describes Sophia after having her first baby by noting in her letter: "she still a big strong girl. Arms got muscle. Legs, too" (Walker *Color* 41). Whereas Celie represents the woman beaten down by the world, Sophia is the exact opposite. When she wishes to make a statement, she does. If a moment causes her to resort to physical action, she returns it in kind. Key to the character is her declaration that reminds us "All my life I had to fight. I had to fight my daddy; I had to fight my brothers. I had to fight my cousins and my uncles. A girl child ain't safe in a family of men" (Walker *Color* 46).

The “Amazon” as characterized by Sophia is fully knowledgeable of the place of the woman in the world and her need of strength to fight against the tyranny of the world, especially that wrought by men in their own community. Celie and Sophia are not the only caricatures presented in the text. After all, it is Shug Avery, the common county whore, who exemplifies the free-spirit that others have attempted to cage. Shug, like Sophia, speaks her mind and enjoys the pleasures of passion and sexual relations, and while she is no different from many of the men who swoon after her, she is depicted as nothing more than a harlot. Consequently it is Squeak, so named for her meek voice, who cannot demand the simple respect of having others call her by her real name. She is but a woman in a man’s world; she cannot declare her own identity. Celie’s sister, Nettie, although educated, falls in conflict with the African villagers because she wishes to change the social order by educating the females. Nettie is quickly reprimanded and put back in her place. Walker’s stance here is essential in revealing the parallels between the fictitious characters in her novel and the indubitable existence of real women of color.

Mary Helen Washington’s readings of Walker’s works reveals what she defines as the construct of “the woman suspended” (41). Interestingly, “the woman suspended” is the perfect description of the experiences of women of color within a postcolonial society. The woman of this description is placed at an involuntary standstill. Her movements, or lack thereof, are dictated by society and the powers which exceed those of woman; man dictates and the woman must obey. Linda Abbandonato discusses the novel stating: “in her representation of the unrepresentable, Walker dares us to arrive at the place where imagination is too far to go” ( 306). The charge of any writer is to take the reader somewhere; however, the destination depends as much on the ethnicity of the writer as his or her gender. Walker forces the reader, male and female, to reexamine the experience of the woman within a postcolonial setting; a setting wherein the men of color have found freedoms that they continue to deny their women. Walker’s discourse as noted in *The Color Purple* is also realized in her text, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*.

The key narratives framed within the work revolve around Grange Copeland. The other major narratives in the text act as subsets to those of Grange’s, and are explored through the life of his son Brownfield and Grange’s granddaughter, Ruth. In his article, “Speech, After Silence: Alice Walker’s *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*”, Harold Hellenbrand opens discourse on Walker by noting Walker’s earlier declaration of two factors acting as strains on black fiction: “the chronicle of a black family and the tale concerned primarily with racial confrontation” (113). Through a careful examination, one is able to view the lives of the Copeland’s and understand the difficulties they face

while combating the rural south. The narrative expressed within the novel revolves around the male characters; however, the women referenced in the work speak volumes of the aforementioned female battle against imperialism and sexism.

### **Toni Morrison**

Morrison's essay "Thoughts on the African-American Novel" discusses specifically the role of the novel within the African American community. Accordingly, Morrison describes the novel as a product produced for the middle class. As it would seem, those who were a part of the lower class or the upper class had everything they needed; however, the middle class, in the wake of the industrial revolution needed something to help them define the new space they would inhabit in society. Morrison notes: "they [the middle class] had no art form to tell them how to behave in this new situation. So they produced an art form" (30). The shift here in writing would make up for a lack stories that had been shared through music, or oral traditions among the lower classes.

Furthermore, it would not be as refined as the art or fine antiques of the aristocracy. The novel became a success because of its ability to not only teach proper protocols to a burgeoning society, it was also able to convey new experiences "In the same way that a musician's music is enhanced when there is a response from the audience...it's of some importance to me to try to make that connection" (Morrison *Novel* 31). One would likely agree that Morrison has been successful in making that connection. There are numerous works for which Morrison is known. There are also multiple experiences conveyed through her writings, primarily those of African American women.

For many, Toni Morrison is known as the African American laureate who transposed the delicately framed story of the slave Sethe in her Pulitzer prize winning work *Beloved*. This aspect of the "American reality" is a part of that same reality professed by other African American female writers who use their writings to formulate a space that has been denied to them by society.

Toni Morrison's seminal work, *Beloved*, is a work that helps to connect the African, and to an extent, the American community by recounting a period of American history that has often been difficult at times to discuss. It is through the character Sethe, a former slave, that one learns of one of the major hardships created by slavery. Essentially this is a hardship that affects women with a ferocity unlike that of their male counterparts. The story of the runaway Sethe is further complicated by her choice to ensure that her children would not have to return to slavery when her former master finds her in hiding. Sethe uses the only method

of control she has, that is, control over the lives of her children, and takes it upon herself to spare them from slavery through death. Fortunately, her attempt is foiled, but not before she is successful in murdering her oldest child, a girl whose headstone reads “Beloved”. The “Beloved” one lives on however in spirit and dominates the house on 124, “the ghost that tried them so” (Morrison *Beloved* 4). It is not until the reappearance of a man in the house and a strange girl that helps one to understand the choices made by Sethe, and for that matter, the other slave women whose heritage is fashioned by colonization.

Sethe is Morrison’s paradoxical character. She is also the quintessential female slave: appeasing the desires of her children; adhering to the governing powers of her white masters. She is so loyal, in fact, that she receives a gift from the mistress of Sweet Home, “a present from the lady I worked for” (Morrison *Beloved* 58). Unfortunately, the life afforded to Sethe in Kentucky on the Sweet Home plantation is anything but “sweet”. A chance at freedom leads Sethe to strike out; however, she is unsuccessful at first and becomes the victim of a sexual assault by Sweet Home’s patriarchal power: Schoolteacher, and his boys. The men exact their will over the young slave woman and commit an act of theft that forever scars Sethe. Sethe recounts her experience, repeatedly saying: “those boys came in there and took my milk. That’s what they came in there for. Held me down and took it.” (Morrison *Beloved* 16). The mother’s breast, which bears milk, the gift of life, is the only thing which the poor slave woman can give to her children. It is a rare and precious gift that some slave women are not able to give their children because they are at times responsible for nursing the children of their owners. According to the power structure established by imperialism, the female slave, like her male counterpart, is a thing to be used. In this case, Sethe embodies a role that countless slave women were forced to take part in: one to amuse the master who wields complete power. It is because of her understanding of this system that Sethe makes her way to freedom and asserts a level of power and authority that had been previously denied to her, and to an extent, her children. Sethe, on the precipice of destruction is able to bring herself back and begins life anew, free with Baby Suggs. Sethe’s new claim to freedom is short-lived when her former master and rapists (Schoolteacher’s boys) find her and desire to return her to the sugary Sweet Home. It is at this moment that Sethe takes her role as a free woman and essentially a mother to a new level. Sethe decides that her children will find more satisfaction in a freedom filled death rather than a freedom-less life. One may question the motive of the runaway slave woman, yet if one studies the ladder of authority designed with the Imperialist in mind, the slave woman has only power over her children. Furthermore, what little power she has is dictated last in her favor. Thus, Sethe attempts to free her children from the burden of slavery, forever increasing her burden as seemingly

illustrated by the chokecherry tree that now “could have cherries” (Morrison *Beloved* 16). The tree itself is a reminder of her past difficulties; likely enhanced now with red cherries symbolizing the blood of her children. The discussion here of Sethe and her decisions provides evidence toward the explanation of the female grasp toward obtaining control where formerly she had none.

It has been noted that Morrison’s attempts through her novels is to make a connection between the literature and the reader. What then is the connection offered by works like *Beloved* or *The Bluest Eye*? Whereas Walker’s quintessential female characters essentially act as caricatures for various women in society, it seems that Morrison’s women are quite effective in their ability to connect specific periods and the existence of women during those periods to the reader. Pecola, Claudia, Frieda, Pilate, Sethe, are excellent figures that help one to understand periodized existence for African American women. From slavery to the depression and even afterwards, the women of Morrison’s works shed light on the female psyche; its attempted development as well as its stifling by both society and black men. Yet there is apparent connection between the periodized experiences of these characters and other black female characters expressed through other writings. Therefore, there is proof that the shared existences of these fictitious women are likened to those of the very real women who created them, women who essentially understand their role as a beast of burden.

### **Jamaica Kincaid and Audre Lorde**

Jamaica Kincaid had begun her writing career in the United States without having any awareness of a Caribbean literary tradition. Her works, however, are from the very beginning is distinctly Caribbean because it shares thematic preoccupations and stylistic devices with a majority of Caribbean writers features. For this reason, she may be said to accommodate to the Caribbean canon established by a number of seminal works from the fifties and sixties, a period that witnessed a boom in Caribbean literature in the Western metropolis mainly through the works of the gifted male artists mentioned earlier. Critical studies in the course of the sixties and seventies acclaimed these writers as central figures and outlined a critical approach tracing the thematic concerns, dominant tropes, narrative modes and aesthetic trends of Caribbean literature, which included: a preoccupation with history, cultural dominance, individual and communal identity; a concern with naming the landscape and validating the local; a prevalence of narratives of alienation, exile and nostalgia; a focus on childhood experience; a preference for the autobiographical mode and the realist tradition. With the exception of the realist mode, which she rejects as inappropriate to a reality conceived as extending far beyond the realm of physical

evidence, Jamaica Kincaid seems to fit easily into this distinctly Caribbean tradition.

Her most acclaimed novel, In the collection of stories *At the Bottom of the River*, Kincaid's first book, a girl approaching maturity comes to terms with her domineering mother. In her process of self-formation, she is caught in a bundle of contradictory feelings: she deeply loves and hates her mother at the same time; she relishes the safety of dependence, but strives for separation; she longs for union with the mother, yet perseveres in resistance. The nostalgia for a pre-oedipal union with the mother seems to evoke the innocence of a pre-colonial world still uncorrupted by conflict and violence, whereas the maternal rejection of the daughter striving for autonomy may recall the colonial alienating power relegating its subjects to a subaltern position. The mother, whose love is wonderful yet claustrophobic, represents a threat of erasure for the daughter, who must struggle to articulate a separate identity and affirm her own power.

*Annie John* Kincaid's first novel, explores the same themes in a more articulated socio-historical setting. Within a reality marked by poverty, racism and political and cultural oppression, the mother-daughter theme offers a paradigm of psycho-social female development in the specific context of the Caribbean. As she matures, the girl comes to terms with the emotional conflicts common to adolescence and with the cultural conflicts which characterise her colonial society. The process of identity formation is analysed in relation to the problematics of race, gender and class.

The protagonist has to deal with a mother who is subjected to colonial logic and with a whole society which is oppressive and threatening for her own sense of self. The interrelationship between motherhood and colonialism is here explored more thoroughly than in the first book and the theme of cultural oppression is treated more explicitly. After the success of her first two books, praised by reviewers for the gentleness and the charm of their tone, Kincaid's growing political awareness becomes clear in the controversial essay on Introduction post-colonial Antigua, *A Small Place* where, drawing from firsthand experience, she engages in a sharp and angry criticism of both British colonialism and American imperialism as well as of the corruption and mismanagement of the native government. In this work, the quest for freedom theme is approached at the collective rather than at the personal level since Kincaid is more interested in the implications of colonialism and imperialism on Antiguan national identity and in exploring the mechanisms of power and the ways in which social conditions shape human consciousness. Resistance is advocated as the prime tool of empowerment and, finally, freedom is envisaged in the abandonment of

prescriptive roles and in the rediscovery of the humanity of both conquerors and conquered.

Kincaid's anger and political commitment are then re-inscribed into her second novel, *Lucy* which continues the personal saga started with the earlier fiction. The book records the emotional struggle of a girl growing up and coming to terms with the changes operating on her perception of herself and of the external world. The North American setting, where the protagonist is caught within new power relationships which replicate old ones, offers a wider perspective on the conflict with the biological mother and the colonial motherland, whose memory still haunts the girl obsessively. While the relationship with her white employer seems to replicate the one with her mother, the imperialism of North American society echoes the logic of British colonial power.

The text articulates the quest for the self of a colonial subject confronting the white West and offers alter/native visions on politics and history. Lucy confronts colonial and imperial power structures and gives voice to her own version of the story, seeing it from the perspective of a subaltern subject who finally will become the agent of her own destiny. Like the protagonists of the earlier works, Lucy is able to carry on with her struggle against oppression thanks to the self-determination inherited from the African world her mother embodies.

The obsession with the mother figure is also at the heart of Kincaid's latest novel, *The Autobiography of my Mother*, which, nevertheless, marks an evolution in her work both because the sources are not as strictly autobiographical as elsewhere and also because recurrent themes are treated from a distinct perspective.

Now, Kincaid explores the implications of motherlessness on the definition of the self. The central motif of the protagonist's life, whose Carib Indian mother died giving birth to her, is the absence of a maternal figure who would function as a mirror image necessary to the identification and the affirmation of the self as other. Her writing always responding to a duality of vision, Kincaid also seems to suggest in the protagonist's motherlessness the brutal deprivation of ancestry by colonialism's exterminations of the native people of the Caribbean. In a world marked by death, the protagonist has to invent herself out of loss. Refusing to become a mother, she sustains herself through self-possession and the pleasure of her own body and poses an end to the perpetuation of historical ruin by not letting her ancestral side (whereas her mother is a Carib Indian, her father is half-Scot half-African) be destroyed in reproduction.

Kincaid's latest book, *My Brother*, is a memoir where, relating of the illness and death of her youngest brother, struck by AIDS in his thirties, the author discloses her personal experience of love and loss with the maternal figure always at the centre. The reflection on the mercilessness of existence and the realisation that nothing is stable and true in life gives vent to a flood of memories revolving around the relationship with the fraudulent maternal figure, beautiful and cruel, nurturing and suffocating, adored and hated. Finally, the life of the narrator's brother will stand symbolically for the destiny she has escaped. The text can therefore be read as yet another personal tale of resistance and survival.

### **Audre Lorde**

A self-described "black, lesbian, mother, warrior, poet," **Audre Lorde** dedicated both her life and her creative talent to confronting and addressing injustices of racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia. Lorde was born in New York City to West Indian immigrant parents. She attended Catholic schools before graduating from Hunter High School and published her first poem in *Seventeen* magazine while still a student there. Of her poetic beginnings Lorde commented in *Black Women Writers*: "I used to speak in poetry. I would read poems, and I would memorize them. People would say, well what do you think, Audre. What happened to you yesterday? And I would recite a poem and somewhere in that poem would be a line or a feeling I would be sharing. In other words, I literally communicated through poetry. And when I couldn't find the poems to express the things I was feeling, that's what started me writing poetry, and that was when I was twelve or thirteen."

### **Declaring the Activism of Black Feminist Theory**

As a black, mother, lesbian, feminist, socialist, activist and a poet in the 1960s, "there was usually some part of Audre Lorde guaranteed to offend someone's comfortable prejudices through her prolific writings. Her refusal to be reduced by any one of her many and sometimes contradictory) identities made her a strange contemporary of the Black Arts writers. Audre Lorde was not only married to a white man, but a bisexual white man to boot. Lorde's tendency of inhabiting a space that put her at odds with societal expectations would be a continuous theme throughout her life and her work. Although it would be relatively easy to paint Lorde as a wholesale contrarian, her relationship to the Black Arts Movement was not solely based in opposition.

In addition, Lorde accepted several literary conventions of the Black Arts Movement. Specifically, she used art to encourage social opposition to both racist ideologies and racist institutions.

Consequently, Audre Lorde's oppositional poetics begin as an attempt to conceive of difference in a positive light, a point she crystallizes in her famous address at Hunter College:

It is within our differences that we are both most powerful and most vulnerable...[because] unclaimed, our differences are used against us in the service of separation and confusion, for we view them only in opposition to each other, dominant/subordinate, good/bad, superior/inferior. And of course, so long as the existence of human differences means one must be inferior, the recognition of those differences will be fraught with guilt and danger. (I Am Your Sister 201 - 202)

What Lorde reveals in the passage above is the groundwork for her re-conceptualization of difference. She fundamentally rejects the binary framework that often characterizes the relationship between human differences; a framework based in value judgments, and predicated on exclusion. When one applies Lorde's ideology of difference to the concept of race, her point becomes less obscure. Since whiteness is an identity that has been historically defined by what it is not, the creation of an Other is fundamental to identity formation. Racial difference, therefore, develops Manichean characteristics: a signifier of either racial superiority or racial inferiority.

In order to prevent this dehumanization of difference, Lorde suggests that we must reclaim our differences and define them in ways that expand rather than limit us.

Essentially then, one's difference is the site of creation: a place where a source of shame can transform into a source of pride. Lorde's poem, "Coal," is one of the best examples of how she expands racial difference by challenging the rigid notions of blackness advocated by Baraka and Neal:

Is the total black, being spoken. From the  
earth's inside.  
There are many kinds of open.  
How a diamond comes into a knot of flame  
How a sound comes into a word, coloured  
By who pays what for speaking. (The  
Collected Poems of Audre Lorde 6)

In "Coal" the essence of Audre Lorde's poetic style is revealed in both content and syntax. Rhetorically, Lorde is attempting to re-conceptualize blackness, as it relates to the ideology of Larry Neal and Amiri Baraka,

by subverting the racial essentialism of the black aesthetic and the misogynistic disposition of “Black Art.” This re-conceptualization is accomplished by associating blackness with the power to create rather than to destroy. The speaker in this poem implicitly compares herself to coal, which typically has a negative racial connotation because to be black as coal is to be exceptionally dark, putting the speaker in conflict with Eurocentric aesthetics. As the “darkest daughter of a white-looking black woman who made it known that ‘you [shouldn’t] trust anybody whose face is black, because their heart is black,’” Lorde was fully aware of how stigmatized blackness was as a human difference both inside and outside of the African American community (De Veaux 18-19). Yet the speaker in “Coal” does not express shame or anger at the comparison, but hope. There is hope because coal, and the racial difference it signifies, is not a fixed thing, but capable of evolving. In the most basic sense coal has the potential to transform into a diamond. This symbolic mutability, however, has less to do with actual skin color than with the idea of blackness itself. While Baraka primarily describes black people on the physical plane, demonstrated by his use of “lovers,” “warriors,” and “sons” in his poem “Black Art,” Lorde describes black people on the metaphysical plane as “being spoken from the earth’s inside” (Collected Poems 6). This spiritual understanding of blackness lacks a national, cultural, or phenotypical essence, putting Lorde in direct conflict with one of the theoretical premises of the Black Arts Movement—the black aesthetic. The black aesthetic is based in racial essentialism seeking above all to “destroy the white thing” (Neal 30). For Lorde, however, the enemy is not the white thing, but racial essentialism itself. As demonstrated by the traditionally negative racial connotation of coal, to exclusively rely on racial difference as the basis of individual identity or communal solidarity is to passively accept the inherent limitation of an external definition: a definition rooted in racist histories. Although the black aesthetic is an attempt to redefine blackness positively, “when self- definition is [founded] in limitation rather than expansion, no true face can emerge” (I Am Your Sister 157). Lorde’s penchant for referring to as many of her identities as possible is indicative of this desire to continually expand beyond her limiting social categories. This idea of expansion is the method by which Lorde threaded diversity throughout her life: a method built upon the idea of creation, not destruction.

What truly separates “Coal” from Baraka’s “Black Art,” however, is its subtlety. “Coal” does not scream at the reader with pedantic notions of black superiority, or rely on berating the white oppressor, or attempt to masculinize revolution by “kill[ing], shoot[ing] guns, or wrestl[ing] cops into alleyways” (Gates and McKay 1943). Instead Lorde reminds the reader of the truth: that coal is a fuel or, less abstractly, that your racial difference is a source of power. This power is not the ability to destroy

the oppressor, but the power to expand yourself. Lorde hints at this notion in the first two lines of the poem:

“I / Is the total black” (Collected Poems 6). The use of “I” (the first person singular subject) with “is” (the third person singular verb) is more than merely a break in subject-verb agreement. According to Michelle Wright, since Lorde wrote almost exclusively in Standard English, one cannot dismiss this poetic device as a stylistic attempt to sound black or “conform to the slam style” (Wright 162). I propose that this I-is construction relates to the idea of expansion. I claim that an ever-expanding definition of oneself, free from binary hindrances and social constructs, is symbolized by Lorde’s rejection of non-standard grammatical syntax. According to Margaret Morris this “decidedly Modernist style was purposely elusive and fragmented in order to problematize every comfortable assumption generated by essentialism” (Morris 100). This point becomes even more persuasive when one examines the spacing of this I-is construction. Since the “I” occupies a line by itself, and is immediately followed by the phrase “is the total black,” Lorde physically distances racial categorization from the speaker. In addition, the use of “is” rather than the grammatically correct “am” further exacerbates this distance. But more important than the conceptual distance between the speaker and her race is the actual space (on the page) that this distance creates. Specifically, the empty space after the “I” suggests that the speaker is more than simply the aggregate of her racial features. This space suggests infinite possibilities and symbolizes a diverse way of self-identifying that is not limited to a single voice. If one examines the use of this space in conjunction with Lorde’s term “total black,” then a new understanding of blackness emerges: a blackness without limits.

Semantically, to say I am black, is to be categorized and contained within the historical reference of race. But when the speaker identifies as the “total black” that singular historical reference is problematized and expanded because the “total black” is not a reductive category inherited from slaveholders. The “total black” is a primal, spiritual, all-inclusive association without a perceivable limit, or in other words the total black is “spoken from the earth’s inside.” While Baraka’s understanding of blackness is narrow and signified by sameness, Lorde’s understanding of blackness is open to diversity and “there are many kinds of open.” Thus, in “Coal” Lorde effectively subverts the violent misogyny of “Black Art,” the racial essentialism of the black aesthetic, and the ideology of containment by expanding the concept of blackness.

Race, however, no matter how much it is expanded, is not sufficient to fully express Lorde’s identity. Lorde’s humanity, “her will to be,” demanded the full recognition of her gender (Wright 55). In her poem “Black Unicorn” Lorde continues to subvert the ideology of containment

by directly challenging Amiri Baraka's sexist construction of black people. While Baraka privileges male power in "Black Art," Lorde diversifies the black experience by making black women the central focus in "Black Unicorn":

The black unicorn is greedy. The black unicorn is impatient. The black unicorn was mistaken for a shadow or symbol and taken through a cold country where mist painted mockeries of my fury. It is not on her lap where the horn rests but deep in her moonpit growing. The black unicorn is restless the black unicorn is unrelenting the black unicorn is not free. (Collected Poems 233).

Related to "Coal" Lorde once again demonstrates her poetic subtlety and mastery of conceit; however, unlike the image of coal, the black unicorn does not represent the mutability of blackness but is a placeholder for black women. With a "horn" growing from "deep in her moonpit" rather than in "her lap," the speaker explicitly genders the black unicorn as female. In conjunction with this gendering, Lorde alludes to elements of the African-American experience when characterizing the black unicorn. For example, the idea of a black body being "taken / through a cold country / where mist painted mockeries / of...fury" evokes the horrors of the Middle Passage. The history of being kidnapped from one's home and taken to an alien country, where even the climate comes to represent all that you have lost, is the same history that has shaped (and continues to shape) the African American literary tradition. The combination of these gendered and racial signifiers, suggests that the black unicorn functions as a poetic symbol for African American women.

In Audre Lorde's work, the force of silence appears as a recurring and varied theme. Many of Lorde's most powerful and evocative passages depict a battle against the devastating effects of a life withheld, of a natural voice stifled by the fearful effects of hegemony. As the story of a young life examined retrospectively from a confrontation with her own mortality, Lorde's "biomythography" *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (1982) is composed in a manner fitting the complicated nature of what it often takes to be its greatest adversary: silence within, and silence without. In *Zami*, Lorde responds to this adversary not only with words, but—in an iteration of the ideological call to arms for which she became famous—by taking up the master's tools to dismantle the master's house, deploying various strategic silences of her own.

As such, Lorde's *Zami* complicates a common assessment of the late-twentieth-century turn to memoir, as a neoliberal symptom of the

deepening commitment to personal identity—a commitment that some contend amplifies rather than meaningfully contests the structural forces that reproduce the very inequalities such assertions of identity can often purport to fight. Even as it appears to exemplify such a turn, in its own way Lorde's *Zami* can also be seen as of a piece with the kind of aspiration toward “impersonality” advocated by a longer tradition of American writers, from the Transcendentalists to the modernists, in which “personal” material is deemed only worthy of inclusion insofar as it speaks to that which is “universal.”<sup>4</sup> But more relevant to its time, and perhaps more importantly, *Zami* also demonstrates a paradoxical picture of the importance of self-ownership in an increasingly neoliberal age, by rejecting identity-as-commodity in favor of a self-forged vision that protects her from the violent assaults of the status quo. That is to say, *Zami* emerges at a moment just before personal identity became equivalent with personal branding, when one could still imagine an insistence on narrating one's truth regarding engagements with inscriptive identity as undertaking a transcendent, radical act.

However, to claim for *Zami* a transcendence above identity discourse would seem to place it at odds with the memoir form itself—particularly one that predicates its significance, and urgency, on asserting the importance of categories of identity that amatively resist the norms of the status quo. After all, as Lorde articulated in an interview published while still writing *Zami*, the very inspiration behind the project was to arm the legitimacy of a specifically “intersectional” identity: one that was African American, lesbian, and professionally aligned with literary studies:

I call it a biomythography. I wrote the book out of a need I heard in the black women's community—that's how it first started. Barbara Smith said to me: 'I'm a black lesbian feminist literary critic and I don't know whether it's possible to be a black lesbian feminist literary critic and survive.' When I heard that—just about five years ago—I thought, 'Oh boy, I've got to start writing some of that stuff down. She needs to know that yes, it is possible.' And it grew from that. [ : : : ] I learned a lot in doing it, but then again I learned a lot in learning how to write prose, a different kind of thinking.<sup>5</sup>

As such, for Lorde, the project's overt commitment to identity required a pastiche of genres in order to formalize the relationship to self she sought to evoke for the sake of arming an identity that did not, on its own, feel safe in the world: the “biomythography”, part highly historicized memoir, part timeless creation myth. As an aspect of this,

the project also required grappling with a key problem that remains with us today, and one that puts her work in a certain alignment with a history of radical thinkers that stretches back well past the neoliberal turn: how to write from the perspective of the individuated self in such a way that will be arming and resonant for the individual reader, such that one's work might forge a sense of community while also asserting a political value beyond the narrative of the individual. One might say that in this way—both formally and politically—Lorde's work stands in a clear lineage with African American women's life-writing, from the slave narratives and spiritual confessions of the nineteenth century, to migration narratives of the mid-twentieth, to the autobiographical writing of second- and third-wave feminisms.<sup>6</sup> In each of these iterations, racial and sexual inequality writ large appear to imbue literary form with something like an "indexical" register, such that asserting the particularized narrative voice correlated at various moments to the assertion of political personhood—or even that of full humanity—worthy of recognition in the public sphere. As such, despite its mid-century temporal scope, the aim and structure of Lorde's 1982 memoir can be understood as participating in a much longer tradition of African American autobiography, and in the kind of formal experimentation demanded by such political aims. For authors forced to bear the unequal norms of socially-ascribed identity, the memoir form emerged early on as an elastic mode, one that could demonstrate liberation from the hierarchical hegemonies of essentialized personhoods. But through *Zami*, Lorde also formalizes the very question that she famously posed: can we, after all, dismantle the master's house by using the master's tools? (Lorde 1984) That is to say, can an assertion of the same kind of normative identity-discourse that had been used to silence and thus deform the development of individual consciousness become instead a means of political empowerment? More precisely, the formal choices that structure *Zami* seem to imply a standing question animating contemporary narratives of identity more broadly: how does the racialized individual plausibly locate herself in historical time, without abandoning the notion of racial deference altogether? The works that precedes *Zami* considers such questions through a reading of Lorde's *Zami*, concerning both the role of silence in the protagonist's personal development and the significance of a critically overlooked and yet conspicuous omission from its text: that of the politically and socially cataclysmic death of Emmett Till in August 1955.

Though absent from her prose memoir, Till's death and its powerful effect appear elsewhere in Lorde's poetry, speeches, essays, and interviews, including the interview cited above. Held just before the publication of *Zami*, at the event Lorde read "Afterimages," her long poem that memorialized Till's death, reaching back almost 30 years to evoke the experience of being visually assaulted by the photographs of

Till's mutilated corpse circulating in mass media during the summer of 1955. After the reading, Lorde and Fran Moira discussed the difficulties that attend a white woman and a black woman discussing race. In response, Moira noted "Afterimages" as a piece that evokes what Lorde had described as differences between white and black women that are rooted in both history and in the body. Lorde replied, "A lot of it is history that we have come through; a lot of it is centered within me, within you".<sup>7</sup>

Though Lorde's assertion of such "centering" elicited unquestioned assent, locating social and political history in the body invites complex, and paradoxical, political entailments. In Lorde's work, we can see one way in which such complexities could be smoothed over by virtue of authorial decisions regarding literary form, and by the treatment of historical content. For Lorde, the death of Emmett Till could not be represented in prose, nor even in the memoir itself, but demanded a free verse poem instead. More specifically, it was the encounter with the representation of his murder, and the proliferation of the image of his corpse, that Lorde wanted to narrate as a personal experience, but did not want to include in the "biomythography". The combined appearances and disappearances in her work of this highly politicized murder illuminate aspects of how Lorde's own racial consciousness developed during both the time covered by *Zami*, approximately 1924 to 1956, and during the time of its publication, 1982. But it also suggests broader insights into the workings of racial ideology itself post-Jim Crow-particularly how it could appear to be both independent of and utterly derived from the contingencies of its recent history, at the same time.

### **Introduction**

From all the extensive and exhaustive black women representative works so far considered, we, therefore, conclude by examining the account of shared commonalities between the lived experiences of all women it should therefore seem unquestionable that there exists a divided front within the realm of feminism, and to a lesser extent feminist criticism. The established models of feminism have become outdated in a globalized world. Colonialism has touched everyone. Literature, alone, provides a firm testament to the lives of women. Black women, as well as other women of color have been affected differently, yet it does not override the fact that all women have been affected. Perhaps time will be the deciding factor in bringing together a truly united front that does not separate them of the world. Instead one will finally acknowledge that they are all women and equally included and protected by a united multicultural feminist front.

### Summary

We have through succeeded in drilling the students through the considered topic in the module and summarily justify that black women have found more often that their writings must attempt being loud and enduring by not offending Europeanized males as well as black males. Ironically they must also be careful not to include details within their writings that would keep them from being separated from other writings by women as this is evidently reflected in all the representative works we have considered.

### Tutor Marked Assignment

- (1) What is the essence of postcolonial feminist representation in black women writings? Discuss exhaustively.
- (2) Is post colonial feminist theory worth sustaining the relegating and neglecting background of a black woman especially in contemporary world? Justify or contradict
- (3) How would you reconcile change and women in their overwhelming pursuit and soloicit for independence and identity in comparative black literature? Discuss.
- (4) What is womanism? And how has it helped in protecting the image and identity of African-American& Caribbean women?
- (5) Discuss the issues of race, gender and women empowerment in Alice Walkers *The Color Purple* and Toni Morison's *Beloved*.

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## MODULE 7: READING CARIBBEAN WRITING: A CROSS-CULTURAL APPROACH TO REPRESENTATIONS OF SELECTED CARIBBEAN WORKS

### INTRODUCTION

This last module is intended to explore the representative selected Caribbean authors whose works have impacted and reflected the Caribbean society. Literature of the Black Diaspora locates within its multi-layered gamut, a kaleidoscope of artistic productions; self-narratives careered by the quest for identity and self-expatriation from a ruthless atmosphere of slavery and racial subjugation. Studies have fixated on thematic preoccupation, language form in works of Caribbean traditions.

### Objectives

At the end of this topic, the students are expected to:

- (1) Be voraciously familiar and acquainted with the major Caribbean authors
- (2) Be well conversant with their common themes and image
- (3) Duly understand the plight and plausibility behind their pursuit and writings

### Main Content

Owing to the forced and voluntary migrations have given shape to artistic representations as well as critical ordering and reordering, black literature of the Diaspora cannot be untangled from the thread of struggle, self-assertion and cultural survival in a new home simmered in dehistoricisation and cultural abrogation. Slavery and barefaced racism were the attendant nightmares for blacks who were forcefully transported from Africa during the Atlantic slave trade. In 1619, James Town in Virginia was the first historical abode of the twenty slaves who turned out indentured labourers working on the American plantation. Slavery is the single most premeditating factor from which black literature evolved. Corroborating this, Butcher, 1956 avers that:

*Slavery introduced into the very hearts of Blacks, a crucial dilemma whose resultant problems with their progressive resolutions account for many fateful events in Black history and for most of the characteristic qualities of Black culture.*

The psychological trauma that followed this altered the lives of blacks. Black representations came through literature and several other art forms

rooted in the black vernacular that became the quest media for self-reinscription into the fabric of black identity and cultural survivalism of post-slavery era. The reality is that rootlessness and homelessness in their strange home created in the blacks a search for their home where there is physical and spiritual harmony.

The identity motif is to this literature the steel that makes its presence undeniable. Literary scholars have asserted that the journey motif is not a new phenomenon. In fact, it is one of the most common features in literature; from the quest narrative, the picaresque, to the American western autobiographical works.

Angelou (1986), *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, also a self-fictional representation of a trajectory of physical and psychological quest for assertion, situates within black identity and journey motif and reflective of double burden for a world stifled by racism and female otherness. The heroine faces more intense physical and psychological upset as first a woman and a black woman in particular. This black character's experiences are connected to journey motif as many of such narratives conspicuously relate. In the words of Fanon, the earnest search for self and cultural affirmation has yielded in exactitude:

The corrosive element all that comes  
near them, the  
deforming element disfiguring all that  
has to do with  
white beauty and morality, the  
depository of maleficent  
powers and the unconscious  
irretrievable element of  
blind forces (Fanon, 1963: 32).

Fanon's view hinges on a counter discourse of cultural elitism that has perpetrated lopsided racial subjugation against the blacks. There is to this end, an attempt at cultural retrieval, seen here as identity repatriation from the condescension of the black personality and to the appropriate undistorted truth about black historiography rooted in nobility rather than the ignominy configured by the white man.

Literature of The Black Diaspora assumes the satellite for the artistic rendering of identity search and cultural recuperation. This essay, against this backdrop, explores struggle, identity and cultural survival in purposively selected self-fictional text through for instance, the George Lamming's plot and characterization model. It foregrounds the discourse of identity careered through journey motif in the novels that have been drawn from the African American and Caribbean traditions.

The practice of reading Caribbean writing, and the representation of writers in the work of seven major Caribbean writers: Edward Kamau Brathwaite, V.S. Naipaul, Derek Walcott, Wilson Harris, Richard Wright, Ralph Elision and George Lamming. Since the emergence of an identifiable body of Anglophone Caribbean writing in the 1950's and 1960's, the literature of and about the Caribbean has largely been read in terms of a search for identity. Aesthetic renaissance has become a key aspect of this search for identity and is being manifested in a thematic, formal and stylistic preoccupation with writing and reading that is evident in the literary works of Brathwaite, Naipaul, Walcott, Harris, Lamming, Elision, and Wright.

The work of Russian literary theorist and philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin is central to my development of a cross-cultural approach to Caribbean writing. It is my intention to suggest that Bakhtin's work offers a valuable resource and response to the dilemma faced by the Western reader of Caribbean writing: a resource that not only provides a rich area of analysis in the field of cultural, linguistic and literary hybridisation, but that also implicitly offers a valuable theorisation of the practice of reading across cultures. There is this existing cloak of intersectionality between Caribbean and postcoloniality. With subject matter in the work of the selected Caribbean major writers, we wish to consider questions of language, authorship, history, reading and the tempero-spatial representation of the cross-cultural Caribbean.

The foregrounding sense of self and identity form the bedrock and foundation of Caribbean writing.

The orthodox critical approach to Caribbean writing is to read the literature of the region in the simple terms of a search for identity. However the Caribbean literary canon are thematically, formally and stylistically preoccupied with the practices of reading and writing. Of course, these two readings of Caribbean writing are by no means mutually exclusive. The practices of reading and writing are both by their very nature practices of identification and representation. Nor is it exactly unusual that Caribbean writers should demonstrate an obsession with the representation of writers and readers, the written and the read in their work. Hailing from a region of islands that only recently achieved political independence from colonial rule, these writers- Brathwaite, Naipaul, Walcott, Harris, Lamming, Elison, and Wright, have participated in and been witness to a unique period of historical transformation. It is only natural that as Caribbean writers they should be concerned with how the Caribbean region is read by Caribbeans and non- Caribbeans alike. Equally, it is only right that they should reflect upon their role as 'Caribbean writers'.

The concept of hybridity has been appropriated within contemporary literary and cultural criticism as a way of reading Caribbean writing. It makes clear that all gestures toward the reading of Caribbean writing in essential or universal terms will be severely misplaced. Instead, any and every reader of Caribbean writing must take account of the 'diversity and hybridity' that defines the Caribbean as a region of independent and interrelated islands. The hybridity of the region and its literature is a visible product of the events of Caribbean history: a history which since the arrival of Christopher Columbus at the end of the fifteenth century has seen the virtual eradication of the native populations across the islands, and the voluntary and forced transplantation of millions of people from other parts of the world, most notably Europe, Africa, India and Asia. Therefore, although each writer in this study was born and raised in the Caribbean, each of them can also lay claim to either a legacy of intermixture or a history of ancestral dispossession. Owing to the ugly history and experience of the Caribbean hybridity recognises the Caribbean as the meeting place of old and new worlds, coloniser and colonised, and suggests that in the contact zone produced by the process of colonisation something new is necessarily produced. Such a notion of cultural contact (albeit in a variety of forms) inevitably finds its way into the Caribbean writing of Brathwaite, Naipaul, Walcott, Harris, Elision, Lamming, and Wright.

### **Unit 1: George Lamming: Aesthetics of Self Recovery in *The Castle of my Skin***

George Lamming's *In the Castle of my Skin* (1953) is to a great degree a narrative that exhibits the quest for self recovery. The novel is couched in the mold of bildungsroman or an autobiography. This is because it relates the journey from infantile innocence of the protagonist G to adult awareness. It is instructive to note that the novel does not only explore the story of an individual childhood but also focuses on the more resounding intention of the insurrection of the colonial grip in the community that seeks to unskin the fragile cloak of childhood.

Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin*, which suggests the essential outlines of the typical boyhood in a west Indian community that is growing painfully like four boys in the novel into political self-awareness; and his concern to suggest the complex shifting in the community at large, at times, takes precedence over any notion of fidelity to the boy's consciousness.

In other words, the novel fictionalises the community's quest albeit, through an individual character desires to grow within the repressive actions of colonial government. We found in Lamming's novel, an artistic portraiture of the locomotion; the physical and mental of the community conflated into the individual who seek route, out of the

imperialist constriction of self-will and collective cultural sovereignty. The autobiographical stature of the novel is hinted at:

*Indeed, the book itself enacts a similar dynamic: just as G. seeks to develop a viable personal identity amid the confining restraints of colonialism, so too does Lamming seek a viable mode of cultural expression amid a tradition dominated by European models.*

G. the fulcrum of narrativisation is embroiled in a restrictive and frosty colonial environment. This novel is some portraiture of national awakening in Barbados even as in exile they recreate in their homes.

Lamming's fiction weaves historical and social wrangling of peasants in Barbados specifically and blacks in general. G, novelistic de-stasis is the growth of West Indian society emerging from the yoke of slavery into a society unburdened by freedom. In comparison, Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* runs parallel to the character unfolding in Lamming's autobiographical fiction. The society in Lamming's narrative revolves around G. that represents a society in transition and the struggle for identity, history and race, made obvious in the lives of people Lamming tries to artistically reproduce. Lamming's G is molded by experiences. These experiences are provided for him and his family. Religion, the gang, school, the politics of the time, and childhood as Lamming shows are sad and insane for G.

The typical recognition of Mr. Slime as Black Jesus is a reflection of a journey into the scriptural world of indoctrination. Mr. Slime is viewed as "a kind of Black Jesus" (167). The establishment of the Penny Bank and the friendly society contributes to the kinesic character of the novel as the people aspirations are shown in the peasant life of G.

Religion offers G's criminality a sort of protection. He refuses the lure of integration into the religious body. This body demands that G takes a new form. This scares him as their identity as constructed by G is repressive and he fears and reflects on the invitation of rebirth in Christ. Religion to the children is devoid of such deeper commitment in its pragmatic nature but they soon come to the discovery of the landlord's place. The party at which the landlord hosts the expatriate sailors is seen by Boy Blue as the next word:

...Is like a next world, the music an "the drink and all than,  
a particular way they hold on to one another"  
(In the  
Castle, 173).

The awareness that occurs in landlord's garden brings them into his scheme. The prayer group that the boys refused to join becomes their hideout. They by this, reach the awareness of the criminal roles they take up but find the experience rather delighting and no thought ruse for a change. By escaping into the prayer group, what Lamming re-echoes is Karl Marx's praxis "religion is the opium on the masses". They through this escape strife and suffering imposed on them by their will to inscribe themselves to the zone of comfort that has eluded them.

Religious identity as Lamming fictionalises is couched in logical statement. It is rather hypocritical to temporarily escape into religion which falls short of permanent respite, solace or comfort but reprieve for only the moment.

*In the Castle*, education of children does not incorporate the history of slavery. This stifles the child identity as he takes subjugation without questioning it. This form of education affects the unprotesting child and perpetually keeps him dependent without his sense of perception for freedom and independence shaped. It is instructive that G is instigated to stone the headmaster and becomes a hero. He carries this out and his innocence makes him confused and in the end, he does that get punished and he does not complain.

In the *Castle of my Skin* and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* is both a bildungsroman and kuntlesroman. These novels trace the development of individuals from innocence to awareness and the growth of the artists through apprenticeship to vivid manifestation of their creative dimension.

Lamming very much like James Joyce's in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, borrows the device of the epiphanies. An epiphany has three dimensions and therefore calls for a transformation. Atherton avers that, "an epiphany is that moment when a thing gains significance". It could perhaps, be when a person made remark which displays his true character when he is as we say "gave him away".

In another sense it may suffice a sudden realization or revelation unpremeditated which as Gerald Manly Hopkins sees "when one part of the veil shrouding the mystery of the world was suddenly drawn aside for a moment, and the true meaning of an object revealed...." (guld in Atherton XII).

In Christian belief, it is the period when God manifests himself: the epiphanies in the novel are however more of group experiences than personal ones. Lamming's G's transforming knowledge, his realisation of his identity stem from Boy Blue, a member of his gang at the moment, of his expansion to the development of awareness in individuals, Boy Blue has it that:

You never know as you yourself say when something go off pop in your head and you ain't the same man you think you were, you start to do and say things which you know is true but it seem it ain't you doing and saying them... A thing goes off your head pop pop, an' yours a different man. You ain't the same sort of person everybody is. You start to feel that there's nobody like you, I don't mean that you'll get great, and don't want to speak to anybody. I don't mean that at all. I mean you'll get the feeling there ain't no other man like yourself, that you is you, so to speak, on there can't be any other you. You start to believe you see things nobody else sees, and you think things nobody else think, and that sort of thing can take you far, far; boy, You'll get so lonely it would be a shame...(142 to 143).

Boy Blue's explication of the paradoxical brine of transfiguration which alters one's identity permanently is so apt. In Boy Blue's long talk, the journey motif, the transmutability of identity unfolding through the phases— childhood/innocence to adulthood/maturity is resonant.

His discovery of his own identity as he further hints comes from what his mother earlier told him about the need to develop his own mind. It is instructive that G discovers his own identity through the experience of the buried pebble. Boy Blue and G's mother put him on this path of retrieval of self.

The pebble is a representation for distinct individuality or the self. The buried pebble depicts the loss, the change and the phasing off of the old self for the present awareness of the "new" metamorphosed self. The pebble brings to resolution the conflict G feels from within, about his journey away from Greighton to Trinidad. The buried pebble is connected to the hero's endurance of Trumper's departure and movement into America, while Boy Blue and Boy remain in the village to join the police force.

What symb

olises the different directions is the disappearance of the pebble which further hints at the brevity of the gang. The two crabs, intercourse in Lamming's fictional universe acquire a heightened signification. It unwittingly questions human institution of marriage as disrupting the natural flow of human life. Marriage is seen as fraught with hypocrisy. Crabs as against Bambi and Bamina affair stands as a reference point. For the crabs evince "absolute togetherness". This is an iconic mockery of social hierarchy that exists in the West Indian society. Apart from coming to terms with their society, the boys now understood the beauty of crab's eyes from the outside:

"We would find no colour for the eyes. They were so pretty. Not ready. Not red or green..."(128).

What this serves to suggest is that the scale of unawareness has fallen off their eyes and the resultant effect is a vision of beauty in objects surrounding them. This illustrates that Red Indians see beautiful things if their mind's eyes are not shut to see the pleasant in a sordid environment of repression of self will. G. perceives a new identity in Trumper when he returns from America. This feeling makes him anticipate the privileges of adult life. Trumper reveals the rather transformational exigency of his journey to America, where he seeks self-discovery:

*„My people," he said again, or better, my race. „Twas in the states I find it, an" I'm gonna keep it „til my kingdom com. "... if there be one thing I thank America for, she teach me who my race was. Now I'm never going to lose it: Never, Never!" (295).*

Trumper's self-revelation and re-phrasing identity impose don G the longing for exile as exile comes with cryptic footsteps of refinement and stability in the character of Trumper. The common denominator in the foregoing character analyses is a motion from innocence to self-awareness.

## Ralph Ellison

### The Ironical Trajectory of Self-Abstractism to Self-Reformation in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*

The novel *Invisible Man* is mapped into twenty five chapters with a prologue and an epilogue. It chronicles the physical, psychological and spiritual journey of an unidentified African American youth from the cloud of innocence to the light of discovery. The adventure of self-configurative motif of the novel is orchestrated on the existentialist pursuit of inscribing self-essence and attaining "knownness" in the midst of a society that questions the humanity of the Blackman. Trumper reveals the rather transformational exigency of his journey to America, where he seeks self-discovery:

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*Its complex, time, structure, spacious setting, anonymous ethnic hero, allegorical and ethnic characters, ironic theme and ceremonial use of varieties of language all suggest that Ellison (1965) has drawn on Afro-American folklore...and the epic tradition to render his double vision of America (194).*

The nameless protagonist is symbolic and it approximates to one whose other worldview and pernicious deeds strip him of his humanity. Everyman is a matter; occupies as such a space and one only turns on Ellison's concept of invisibility if the human essence is impugned like the main character that synecdoches black anonymity in a world where

the white man is the “visible”. Invisible, in a pejorative sense, gravitates to the reader as the quintessence of Wolfgang Von Goethe’s *Wilhdom Meister* relates the character’s progressive education from apprenticeship through journeyman-ship towards the ideal of “mastery” that manifests up in his name. It is thus pertinent to examine the novel as chronicling the de stasis and kinesis of life from innocence through knowledge. It is a panoramic exposition of the quest of the young blackman to attain recognition in a harsh climate of downing of self-image. As Raji-Oyelade (1993) contends, Ellison relays the question that forms the idea of the novel as the life changing possibilities of man; these questions are:

How does one in the novel (the novel which is a work of art and not a disguised piece of sociology) persuade the ...reader to identify that which is basic in man beyond all differences of class, race, wealth, or formal education?  
How can one give the reader that which we do have in abundance, all the countless untold and wonderful variations on the themes of identity and freedom, necessity, love and death, and with all the mystery or personality undergoing it with endless metamorphosis

The novel attests to ironical plot unfolding. It thus rests on the epic-oriented media with a moving reminiscence of the past twenty years. The story of unidentified author takes the reader through a tortuous macabre of life as experienced by the narrator. The narrator eases us into ironical portraiture:

*I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those  
who haunted Edgar Allan Poe; nor am I one of your  
Hollywood movie ectoplasm. I am a man of substance, of  
flesh and bone, fibre and liquids and I might even  
be said  
to possess a mood. I am invisible; understand,  
simply  
because people refuse to see me (1).*

The notion of invisibility as inferred is not that the character is a ghost as he possesses all the human possibilities, physically rooted but absent in the eyes of teeming racially biased others. This way, it is apparent that the invisibility is artificial and largely a socially constructed one; contrived by politics of identity-racial segregation. In the prologue, we have the end of the protagonist that begins in earnest the story and the

epilogue as the beginning. He provides the rationale for this distorted quotient of plot:

In spite of myself, I've learned something.  
Without the  
possibility of action, all knowledge comes to  
one labelled  
"file and forget", and I can neither file nor  
forget (Invisible  
Man, 467).

His learning or awareness, albeit, starts in the first chapter of the book where the narrator is a Greenwood in the South. The narrator begins earnestly in telling his panoramic story with the assertion that he is an invisible man. His invisibility, he clarifies, is not a material one; he is thus, not literally invisible, but is rather invisibility, perhaps, of self in a world that considers him insignificant and shrunk of individuality. He says that his invisibility accrues some benefit to him. He has been hiding from the world, living underground and stealing electricity from the Monopolated Light and Power Company. He burns 1,369 light bulbs and on the same breath, listens to Louis Armstrong's *What Did I Do to Be So Black and Blue* on a phonograph. He says that he has gone underground in order to write the story of his life and invisibility. As a young man, in the late 1920s or early 1930s, the narrator lives in the South. Being a gifted public speaker, he is invited to give a speech to a group of important white men in his town. The men only compensate him with a scholarship to a prestigious black college, but only after subjecting him to a humiliating duel in a "royal battle" in which he is made to fight other young black men all blindfolded in a boxing ring.

After the royal battle, the white men force the youths to scramble for fake coins on an electrified rug. They are delighted as the boys moan of pain. The narrator in his dream figures that his scholarship is actually a piece of paper reading "To Whom It May Concern . . . Keep This Nigger-Boy Running." At the college, the narrator listens to a long, impassioned sermon by Reverend Homer A. Barbee on the subject of the college's Founder that the blind Barbee adulates in poetic language. After the sermon, the narrator is chastised by the college president, Dr. Bledsoe, who has learned of the narrator's escapades with Norton at the old slave quarters and the Golden Day. Bledsoe rebukes the narrator, saying that he should have shown the white man as an idealised version of black life. He dismisses the narrator, giving him seven letters of recommendation to the college's white trustees in New York City, and sends him there as he seeks a job.

The narrator travels to the bright lights and bustle of 1930s Harlem, where his effort at getting a job proves abortive. The letters of

recommendation do not bring him any employment. At last, the narrator goes to the office of one of his letters' addressees, a trustee named Mr. Emerson. There he meets Emerson's son, who opens the letter and tells the narrator that he has been betrayed: the letters from Bledsoe actually portray the narrator as dishonourable and unreliable. Through the assistance of the young Emerson, the narrator gets a small wage job at the Liberty Paints plant, whose trademark colour is "Optic White".

The narrator temporarily assists Lucius Brockway, the black man who makes this white paint, but Brockway suspects that the narrator is involved in union activities and turns on him. The two men fight as they abandon the paint-making; consequently, one of the unattended tanks explodes, and the narrator is knocked unconscious. The narrator is roused to life again in the paint factory's hospital. During his black out, he loses his memory and capacity for speech. The white doctors seize the arrival of their unidentified black patient as an opportunity to conduct electric shock experiments. After the narrator recuperates with memory restored in the hospital, he collapses on the street. He is consequently taken to some black community members to the home of Mary, a kind woman who lets him live with her for free in Harlem and helps him to develop his sense of black heritage.

One day, the narrator witnesses the eviction of an elderly black couple from their Harlem apartment. Standing before the crowd of people gathered before the apartment, he gives an impassioned speech against the eviction. Brother Jack having observed his speaking prowess; his speech offers him a position as a spokesman for the Brotherhood, a political organization that allegedly works to help the socially oppressed. Initially rejecting the offer, the narrator takes the job in order to reward Mary for her hospitality. But the Brotherhood insists that the narrator takes a new name, breaks with his past, and moves to a new apartment. The narrator is inducted into the Brotherhood at a party at the hotel and is placed in charge of advancing the group's goals in Harlem. On completing his education in rhetoric with a white member of the group named Brother Hambros, the narrator goes to where he is assigned to work in Harlem. There, he meets the handsome, intelligent black youth leader Tod Clifton. He also becomes intimate with the Black Nationalist leader Ras the Exhorter, who opposes the interracial brotherhood and believes that Black Americans should demand their rights over and against all whites. The narrator delivers speeches and becomes a high-profile figure in the Brotherhood. He relishes the task. One day, however, he gets a note warning him to remember his place as a black man in the Brotherhood.

Not long after, the black Brotherhood member Brother Wrestrum accuses the narrator of trying to use the Brotherhood, to propel a selfish

desire for personal distinction. While a committee of the Brotherhood investigates the charges, the organization moves the narrator to another post, as an advocate of women's rights. After he gives a speech one evening, he is seduced by one of the white women at the gathering, who attempts to use him to the lure of her sexual fantasies about black men. Later, the Brotherhood sends the narrator back to Harlem, where he discovers that Clifton has left. Many other black members have left the group, as much of the Harlem community feels that the Brotherhood has betrayed their interests. The narrator later reconnects with Clifton on the street where he sells dancing "Sambo" doll; dolls that invoke the stereotype of the lazy and obsequious slave. Clifton apparently does not have any license to sell his wares on the street. White policemen accost him and, shortly after some arguments, he is shot dead as the narrator and others look on. In his arrangement, the narrator undertakes a funeral for Clifton and gives a speech in which he portrays his dead friend as a hero, galvanizing public sentiment in Clifton's favour.

The Brotherhood shows displeasure at him staging the funeral without permission, and Jack harshly castigates him. As Jack rants about the Brotherhood's ideological stance, a glass eye falls from one of his eye sockets. The Brotherhood sends the narrator back to Brother Hambro to learn about the organization's new strategies in Harlem.

The narrator leaves one definitely feeling furious and anxious to gain revenge on Jack and the Brotherhood. He arrives in Harlem to find the neighbourhood in ever increased agitation over race relations. Ras confronts him, deploring the Brotherhood's failure to draw on the momentum generated by Clifton's funeral. Ras sends his men to beat up the narrator, and the narrator is forced to disguise himself in dark glasses and a hat. In his dark glasses, many people on the streets mistake him for someone named Rinehart, who seems to be a pimp, bookie, lover, and reverend all at once. At last, the narrator goes to Brother Hambro's apartment, where Hambro tells him that the Brotherhood has chosen not to emphasize Harlem and the black movement. He cynically declares that people are merely tools and that the larger interests of the Brotherhood are more important than any individual. Recalling the advice given to him by his grandfather, the narrator determines to undermine the Brotherhood by seeming to go along with them completely. He decides to flatter and seduce a woman close to one of the party leaders in order to obtain secret information about the group. But the woman he chooses, Sybil, knows nothing about the Brotherhood and attempts to use the narrator to fulfill her fantasy of being raped by a black man. While still with Sybil in his apartment, the narrator receives a call asking him to come to Harlem quickly. The narrator hears the sound of breaking glass, and the line goes dead. He arrives in Harlem to find the neighbourhood in the midst of full-fledged riot, which he learns

was incited by Ras. The narrator becomes involved in setting fire to a tenement building. Running from the scene of the crime, he encounters Ras dressed as an African chieftain. Ras calls for the narrator to be lynched. The narrator flees only to run into two policemen, who suspect that his briefcase contains loot from the riots.

In his attempt to evade them, the narrator falls down a manhole. The police mock him and draw the cover over the manhole. The narrator says that he has stayed underground ever since; the end of his story marks its very locomotive beginning. He states that he finally has come to the decision that he must honour his individual complexity and remain true to his own identity without sacrificing his obligations to the community. He says that he finally feels ready to come out from the underground. For the most accounts of the plot movement of the novel, the reader negotiates a symmetrical movement as the black protagonist does in his confirming self –negotiation until a given identity and awareness suffices. (91).

## **Unit 2: Richard Wright**

### **A Synopsis on: Quest for Distinct Identity in Richard Wright's *Black Boy***

Richard Wright was the grandson of former slaves who was born on Rucker plantation in Dam County, Mississippi in 1908. Wright grew up in a poverty stricken environment. He was enrolled at public high school. His first story is entitled the Voodoo of Hell's Half Acre which was published in Southern Registers local newspaper. Reed Club, the group he joined in 1933 played a significant role in his literary achievements. The publication of *Native Son* in 1945 brought him recognition as a significant voice in African American prose tradition. *Black Boy* subtitled *American Hunger* is an autobiographical recreation of Richard Wright's childhood and young adulthood. He informs us of the background of *Black Boy*:

I wrote the book to tell a series of incidents strung together through my childhood but the main desire was to render a judgment on my environments because I felt the necessity to. That judgment was this: the environment the south creates is too small to nourish human being...I wanted to lend, give my tongue to the voiceless (3).

It is apparent that Wright fulfills the idea that writers are the chroniclers, the visionaries, the mirrors, seers through which societal injustices are

recreated for corrective purpose. Ellison who is believed to have been inspired by Wright also attests to the self-narrative that *Black Boy* typifies. The novel is structured into, "Southern Night detailing his childhood in the south" and "The Horror and the Glory" (which as well reflects his early adult years in Chicago).

The novel starts with a four-year-old Wright setting fire to his grandmother's house and continues in it. Wright is an unusually inquisitive child, living in an environment of strict, religious women and edgy irresponsible men. His recalcitrant nature occasionally puts him in trouble; he recalls the day, and he gets beaten merciless by his mother:

I was lashed so hard and long that I lost  
consciousness. I  
was beaten out of senses and later found  
myself in bed,  
screaming, determined to run, and tussling  
with my  
mother and father trying to keep me still (BB  
4).

He is shown to get easily upset with everything around him; he settles for reading instead of playing with other children, and rejecting the church in favour of a life of atheism at a young age. He feels even more withdrawn as he grows older and comes in contact with tense racial violence of the 1920s south. He does not only find it unjust but he is especially bothered by whites' and other blacks' desire to stifle his intellectual hunger and his will to configure for him a distinct identity.

The mother's frequent illness makes the orphanage home a second shelter for Richard. While he still likes his mother who genuinely loves him he reserves some shade of hatred for his father whom he views as morally decrepit and irresponsible. We catch a glimpse:

Again I was faced with choices I did not  
like, but I finally  
agreed after all, my hatred for my father was  
not as great  
and urgent as my hate for the orphan  
home... (27).

After his father abandons the family, young Wright is taken back and forth among his sick mother, his extremely religious grandmother, and various aunts and uncles. This phase of his life prepares him for a more conspicuous awareness of his society. As he forays into the white world to find jobs, he encounters growling racism and brutal violence, which has a permanent scar in his psyche forever. The family goes through frequent hunger. They have always perceived the north as a place of opportunity; so as soon as they can gather together enough money, Richard and his aunt went to Chicago and pledge to bring his mother

and brother. But before Richard can go to Chicago, he takes to stealing money and lying.

Most times he must do things he does not want to do in a bid to find meaning in a supposedly meaningless and suffering fraught life. He finds the north less simmered in racial discrimination than the south: this becomes a reassessment of his ideas about American race patterns. He gets into many jobs and these fetch meagre earnings. He scrubs floors during the day and settles down with Proust and medical journals by night. His family still lives in great need, poverty still looms large upon this, a stroke cripples his mother, and his relatives constantly eroded his mood. They upset him always particularly about his atheism and his unnecessary reading.

He finds a job at the post office and meets white men who share his sentiment of the world and religion in particular. They invite him to the John Reed Club which is founded to promote the arts and social change. He becomes involved with a magazine called *Left Side*. He slowly becomes immersed in the Communist Party, organizing its writers and artists. At first, he sets his mind in connecting with acquaintances within the party, especially among its black members, but he finds them to be just as livid to cause change as the southern whites he had left behind. The communists fear anyone who questions their ideas and as a result, they soon disregard Wright, who has always been inclined to question and speak his mind. When he tries to leave the party, he is accused of trying to lead others away from it. After he encounters the trial of another black communist for counterrevolutionary activity, Wright decides to abandon the party. He was still seen as a detractor in communism, and party members threaten him away from various jobs and gatherings.

Nevertheless, he does not square up with them because he believes they are in a sense driving towards unity, tolerance and equality which he sees as ideal. He eventually rationalises the deeply-ingrained reformer's ideals and finds writing as a tool for the revolutionary changes for he firmly believes that everyone has a "hunger" for life that needs to be filled, and for him, writing is his way to the human heart.

His self-chronicle comes on the heel of ambivalent crises of identity. The repatriation he undergoes brings him to the crucial artistic armoury, a tool for identity reconfiguration and satiric swipe.

### Unit 3: Edward Kamau Brathwaite

#### A Synopsis on Creolisation and Calibanisation : A Linguistics Aesthetics in Edward Kamau Brathwaite's *The Arrivants* and *X/Self*

Brathwaite's linguistic aesthetics involves him in a writing strategy of 'replacing language' that is central to the understanding of colonial and postcolonial literatures. 'Language is a fundamental site of struggle for post-colonial discourse'. The editors of *The Post-colonial Studies Reader* state, 'because the colonial process itself begins in language'\* 9. The same authors note in their earlier study, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures*, that 'the crucial function of language as a medium of power demands that post-colonial writing define itself by seizing the language of the centre and re-placing it in a discourse fully adapted to the colonised place'<sup>10</sup>. The key strategies for doing this are the interrelated processes of abrogation and appropriation. Abrogation refers to the rejection of the language of the centre (i.e. London, England) as a normative concept, and therefore consciously disturbs the boundaries between so-called linguistic purity and impurity. Appropriation assumes that all language is more or less riddled with impurities, and therefore sanctions and describes- the postcolonial writer's assimilation and adaptation of those aspects of the language and culture of the centre that are most useful for the formation of new identities in the formerly colonised place. In the postcolonial literary text this effects a 're-placing' of language in order to usurp socio-cultural power from the centre, and equally importantly to offer the possibility and conditions for an effective postcolonial voice to emerge. As Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin discover, one of the central paradoxes faced by the postcolonial writer is the 'problem inherent in using a language while trying to reject the particular way of structuring the world it seems to offer' (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back*, p.48). Of the writers in this study, it is Edward Kamau Brathwaite and Wilson Harris who are most troubled by their use of a language that both is and is not theirs. For Brathwaite, this dichotomous relation to language is central to his poetry. Brathwaite's poetry from *The Arrivants* (first published as a complete trilogy in 1973) to *X/Self* (published in 1987) consistently stages a linguistic performance that foregrounds the poet's troubled relationship to the English language. In the former, this linguistic performance most immediately arrests the Western reader in its use of rhythm, as the reader is transported from the cultural and spiritual landscape of the Black diaspora to the 'soundscape' and 'wordscape' of the poem<sup>10 11</sup>. Brathwaite's inventive use of African and Afro- American musical rhythms in *The Arrivants* provides a musical accompaniment to the poetry that helps , to place the poems within a specific cultural context and emphasises the performative aspect of the trilogy. It also complies with Brathwaite's

own notion of a 'jazz' aesthetic at work in Caribbean literature, which is most readily seen in his essay 'Jazz and the West Indian Novel'<sup>12</sup>. As the elements of this aesthetic suggest, this linguistic performance also takes the form of a deliberate play with language. The Caribbean poet of *The Arrivants* is a 'word-breaker' and 'creator' (A, p.167), whose linguistic fragmentation and experimentation necessitates the reader to take a new look at the Caribbean region and its inhabitants. Central to the thematic drive of the trilogy is the need to abrogate and appropriate a language capable of properly naming Caribbean experience. The development of this proposition can be tracked through the poem through the performance of a variety of voices. Each represents a separate aspect of the Black diasporic experience, and each contributes to the eventual emergence of the poet's voice. Moreover, the many voices of *The Arrivants* do not simply interact with one another internally, that is within the confines of this particular text. They also participate in the performance of later utterances. In doing this, they establish themselves as 'links in a continuous chain of speech performances' (MPL, p.72) in which Brathwaite continues to interrogate the nature and implications of language use for the Caribbean poet and his readers. Brathwaite's linguistic performance incorporates a movement from créolisation to calibanisation, in the sense that while his approach to language has always been informed by a cultural process of material, psychological and spiritual intermixture and change<sup>13</sup>, in his most recent work this has resulted in a more direct confrontation with the perceived signifiers of English cultural and linguistic dominance. Brathwaite's linguistic créolisation is now also a performance of linguistic calibanisation, in which the curse that linguistically binds Caliban to Prospero is evaded through the potential intervention of a previously submerged mother (Sycorax) and the re-emergence of a submerged language.

Edward Kamau Brathwaite's linguistic performance can be read in the light of Mikhail Bakhtin's approach to language precisely because Bakhtin's understanding of language, discourse and the utterance is similarly based on a notion of linguistic performance. Simon Dentith makes this point when he notes that for Bakhtin and members of his intellectual circle (and by extension their readers), 'the key move is to take as your starting point language in use rather than language as a code or underlying system'<sup>14</sup>. This is suggested on a number of occasions in Bakhtin's monographs and essays, though for the purposes of illustration one might most readily refer to the opening of the fifth chapter of Bakhtin's study on Dostoevsky and the opening of his 1934-35 essay, 'Discourse in the Novel'. In the former, Bakhtin states that the term 'discourse' signifies 'language in its concrete living totality' (PDP, p.181); whilst in the latter, he notes that 'verbal discourse is a social phenomenon- social throughout its entire range and in each and every of

its factors, from the sound image to the furthest reaches of abstract meaning' (DN, p.259). Consequently, whilst the linguistics of the early decades of the Twentieth century was dominated in Russia by the teachings of Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, it is clear that Bakhtin and his ally and friend Valentin Voloshinov were both concerned to propose a sociological approach to language.

This closing phrase is perhaps Brathwaite's most succinct expression of the positive effects of a process of linguistic creolisation within Caribbean society. In no small part this reflects the fact that Brathwaite's New World trilogy was written at the same time as his doctoral study on creole society in Jamaica in the late Eighteenth and early Nineteenth centuries. For a large part of his working life Brathwaite has been a historian by profession, though it seems safe to argue that his scholarly and creative careers are necessarily intertwined. In particular, Brathwaite argues in *The Development of Creole Society* that contemporary Caribbean society can only be properly understood within the framework of the acknowledged and illicit processes of acculturation and interculturalisation that were in operation during the colonial period. The effects of this intermixture can be recorded throughout all areas of social interaction. Most specifically though, in the context of linguistic performance this allows Brathwaite to claim that: 'It was in language that the slave was perhaps most successfully imprisoned by his master, and it was in his (mis-)use of it that he perhaps most effectively rebelled' (Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society*, p.237). Such a framework of imprisonment, use and misuse and rebellion clearly recognises the fact that during the period of slavery and the plantation system in the Caribbean, linguistic encounters between master and slave were far from benign affairs. However, while language may have been the means through which slaves were socialised and normalised into the structures of slave-society, it also provided the best means through which social, cultural and linguistic dominance could be challenged and brought into question. The linguistic encounter provides the opportunity for the slave to consciously position himself in relation to the words of another (the master), and through his use and misuse of his master's language to assimilate, appropriate and abrogate those words to his own intentions. Of course, just as Brathwaite calls for the acknowledgement of historical continuities between the colonial period and the present, so too it might be argued that the language of contemporary post-independence Caribbean literature can be read as a creolised language that seeks to perform an act of linguistic rebellion.

Edward Kamau Brathwaite's rebellion in *The Arrivants* thematically and formally depends upon a notion of linguistic performance, and it is in the poem's rhythms that this is most immediately evident. 'Rhythms are

crucial to the poem,' Louis James writes in his review of *Rights of Passage*, 'that is why it must be read aloud, and why many European readers without ears tuned to Caribbean cadences are bound to find passages flat and crude' (James, '*Rights of Passage*', 41). James is certainly correct in his opening statement, though his closing assessment is perhaps questionable. For, whilst the ears of a 'European reader' may not be finely tuned to a Caribbean wavelength, it would nevertheless be a resistant reader who does not recognise the thematic importance of the poem's rhythms from the outset.

Brathwaite's trilogy opens with a poem, 'Prelude', in which the words themselves act as instruments of dislocation and détribalisation as the reader is thrust into an unnamed landscape on the verge of extinction. With monosyllabic doom the opening lines establish a sense of language being stretched to its naked simplicity as images of slavery are juxtaposed with a desperate plea for individual and communal salvation to be found in linguistic creativity:

Drum skin whip  
lash, master sun's  
cutting edge of heat, taut surfaces of things  
I sing  
I shout  
I groan  
I dream  
about (A, p.4)

In his magisterial study of Brathwaite's *Arrivants*, entitled *Pathfinder: Black Awakening in The Arrivants of Edward Kamau Brathwaite*, Gordon Rohlehr describes this poem as 'a general introduction and overture to all three books'<sup>17</sup>. He notes too that that the drum is the major word, theme and symbol of the trilogy. The drum 'begins and ends each work, and is the Alpha and Omega of Brathwaite's new poetry. The drum is associated with a principle of rhythm, sound and music that simulates the tones of speech.

Brathwaite's rich use of a variety of sources to shape his poetic vision, suggests an intense endowment of linguistic ingenuity and aesthetics in his literary profession, as this is glaringly evidenced in the performative nature of *The Arrivants*. In one sense, this clearly involves an allusion to actual musical, verbal and literary performance. However, it also involves a performed positioning of the poetic text both culturally and socio-historically.

In the dialogic relation between 'The Dust' and 'X/Selfs Xth Letters...' it might then be suggested that the ending of the former is 'introduced

directly into the context' of the latter, and that the words themselves 'act as representatives of the whole utterance' (that is, as links to Brathwaite's discourse on 'dust'). 'X/Self s Xth Letters...' response places these other utterances in a new literary context, and seeks to appropriate and assimilate those other meanings, intentions and values to a new artistically expressed point of view. Most specifically, 'X/Self s Xth Letters...' shifts the assertions of *The Arrivants* into the poetic context of a more overt and self-conscious concern with linguistic creativity and the material process of writing. In itself this suggests that the more direct linguistic rebellion of 'X/Self s Xth Letters...

arises out of the marriage of thematic content and poetic style. However, it could also be related to a more general shift in Brathwaite's style which itself reflects the recent emergence of an increasingly critically aware post-colonial literature. This can perhaps be attributed to the fact that contemporary Caribbean literature is now into its second and third generation of writers, and therefore addressing a very different kind of (critical) readership than it was in the 1950's and 1960's.

Constructed in the form of a letter that X/Self addresses to his mother, the poem's main thematic and stylistic focus is once again the concrete acquisition of language. This is made clear in the opening lines of the poem as X/Self exclaims: 'Dear Mamma // i writin you dis letter/wha? / guess what! pun a computer o/kay?' (X/S, p.80). From this alone a number of significant implications can be drawn out. It is clear that Brathwaite uses certain conventions of letter-writing in order to start and structure his poem. Yet, X/Self s letter is not a letter in the traditional sense. It also incorporates a sense of direct and immediate response to an unheard and unwritten voice. The 'wha?' here is the first indication of this, and it is followed by a number of other questions: 'say what? / get on wi de same ole // story?', 'since when i kin / type?', 'why i callin it x?' and so on. Collectively these suggest that the presence of X/Self s mother lies in the background of his utterance. It also indicates the extent to which Brathwaite's poem exists on the boundary between speech and writing, and therefore seeks to question the established hierarchy between the two. Brathwaite's language is a literary language but it also emphasises the sound of the voice, the oral and aural. X/Selfs excitable 'guess what!' is one instance of this. The grammar and orthographic presentation of dialect or nation-language is another aspect, whilst the fragmented presentation of the words on the page also further demonstrates the basic orality of the poem. The back-slash before 'wha?' and 'kay?' in the opening lines adds a short but nonetheless decisive pause that in turn results in extra intonational stress being placed on the words following. X/Self s active relation to language takes account of his possession of a computer, and this new instrument of expression also determines the style of X/Self s utterance. The

presentation of the language of the poem gives the impression that X/Self is acquiring and learning, using and misusing, a new language in the process of writing his letter. Most directly, he states at roughly the mid-point of the poem: 'is like what i tryin to sen/seh & / seh about muse/ // in computer & / leamin prospero language & / ting' (X/S, p.84). For X/Self the computer represents the (ambivalent) pinnacle of technological and historical achievement in the West, as he reflects: 'a doan know how pascal & co/ / bait & apple & cogito ergo sum / come to hinvent all these tings since // de rice & fall a de roman empire' (X/S, p.82). X/Self's possession of the computer signifies his investment in the history and language of the West. Yet, his use and misuse of it signals an appropriation of the communicative capabilities it represents for other purposes and alternative intentions. Thus, far from being imprisoned by the language and logic of the computer, X/Self concludes his letter with an indication of rebellion and liberation:

yet a sittin down here in front  
 a dis stone face/eeeelectrical  
 mallet into me fistchipp/  
 in dis poem onta dis tablet chiss/ellin darkness writin in light  
 like i is a some/ is a some/ is a some  
 body/ a x  
 pert or some  
 thing like mores  
 or aaron  
 or one a dem dyaaam isra lite (X/S, p.87)

Here, X/Self's language is shown to be both fragmentary and prophetic. The passage is characterised by a combination of vernacular orthography (i.e. dis, writin, dem dyaaam etc.) and linguistic x-plosion, according to which, words are stretched, broken and repeated. X/Self's writing on the computer screen is also figured in terms of the writing of Biblical laws on tablets of stone, therefore emphasising the depth of his rebellion. The shift from 'chiss/ellin darkness' to 'writin in light' also marks a shift in the very notion of the poet's identity as X/Self. The name or title of X/Self might signify a crossing-out of the Caribbean poet's identity, that is the figuring of the poet as an other/self, a non/self, a nobody. Yet, in this extract the poet is able to tentatively identify himself as a somebody, whilst at the same time retaining the inherent and elusive otherness symbolised by 'x' (i.e. an 'x / pert'). This probative assertion of identity is at first sight a source of anxiety for X/Self, as he asks his mother 'Why is/dat? //what it/mean?'; but, in their allusion to the prior linguistic performance of 'The Dust' these closing lines may also signify the rebellious intent of X/Self. In the language he adopts X/Self's performed utterance is certainly highly stylised and firmly located in an ultra-modern world of computer technology, but these closing lines also indicate that the purpose and meaning of what he

is 'tryin to sen/seh & / seh about muse/ // in computer & / leamin prospero language & ting' shares vital points of connection with a folk language of the oral tradition in which the African presence in the Caribbean is intimately felt.

#### Unit 4: V.S. Naipaul

##### **A synopsis on: Representation of Authority and Authorship in V.S. Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival***

Naipaul's cultural and historical dissociation from the Caribbean is seen in the ironic detachment of his early Trinidadian novels, in the exploration of a more universal dislocation and cultural disorder in the works of his mid-period, and in his re-examination of his own writing self in his most recent books. It is also immediately evident in the titles that Naipaul has given his books, which contain both a yearning for fixity and arrival (e.g. *A House for Mr Biswas*, *A Flag on the Island*, *Finding the Centre*, *The Enigma of Arrival*, *A Way in the World*), and an undying sense of statelessness and loss (e.g. *An Area of Darkness*, *The Loss of El Dorado*, *In a Free State*). His concern throughout is with the question of how the experience of the rootless individual can be written. In his most recent work Naipaul's textual travels have become intimately linked to his own journey, his own life and his own arrival as a writer. In *Finding the Centre*, *The Enigma of Arrival* and *A Way in the World*, Naipaul suggests that only in the process of constructing the narrative of his writing self can the writer come to a new understanding of his rootless existence. 'Half a writer's work,' Naipaul argues in 'Prologue to an Autobiography' (the first of the two narratives that make up *Finding the Centre*), 'is the discovery of his subject':

And a problem for me was that my life had been varied, full of upheaval and moves: from my grandmother's Hindu house in the country, still close to the rituals and social ways of village India; to Port of Spain, the Negro and G.I. life of its streets, the other, ordered life of my colonial English school, which was called Queen's Royal college; and then Oxford, London and the freelances' room at the BBC. Trying to make a beginning as a writer, I didn't know where to focus.<sup>8</sup>

Recognising the importance of his past as a means of understanding his identity as a writer, Naipaul pays due regard here to the important Indian, Caribbean and English aspects of his background that have each contributed to his writing personality. He also acknowledges the difficulty of bringing these together in the early moments of his writing career. In his effort to find some kind of equilibrium between each of them as he enters maturity, Naipaul offers the (cross-cultural) reader an intriguing example of the complex cultural negotiations made and remade by one writer over the course of nearly fifty years of literary production. In response to this, the Indian critic Sara Suleri most pertinently asks of 'Naipaul's Arrival': 'what uneasy commerce can be established between the post-colonial and the writer? Which imperial gestures must such a writer perform, before he can delineate the relation of his language to the canon of fiction written in English?'

\* 9. Appropriating the material reality of empire and trade to the sphere of literary discourse, Suleri asks her reader to consider what kind of negotiations the post-colonial writer (i.e. Naipaul) has made throughout his career in order to reconcile the notions of 'post-colonial' and 'writer'. What is the relation between the terms 'post-colonial' and 'writer'? How does a postcolonial writer's literary and linguistic inheritance affect his entry into the literary marketplace? 'Caught between the excessive novelty of post-colonial history and the excessive anachronism of the canon', Suleri argues:

Naipaul's language functions as a fascinating paradigm for one of the several difficulties at work in the definition of what is commonly called the colonial subject. Its temporal location is curiously threatening; its safety is aligned to the ritual of arrival; its fascination with disparate systems of classification obviates the necessity of facing the question of whether it is possible for a postcolonial writer to exist in the absence of the imperial theme. (Suleri, 'Naipaul's Arrival', 25)

Hinting at the urgent claim for authority that Naipaul's narratives seem to make, Suleri suggests that Naipaul's language exists uncertainly amidst questions of culture and canon, 'equally convinced of the limitations implicit in both modes' (ibid.). His language exposes the reach at the heart of 'the colonial subject', whilst in their repeated return to 'the ritual of arrival', his texts also explore the persistent need for the colonial subject to momentarily find a place of safety within the

post-colonial world. Following this, Suleri intimates that the post-colonial writer's obsession 'with disparate systems of classification' perhaps deliberately delays the need for him to question his role within contemporary cultural debates. Yet, for Naipaul it is this very question that has been the major preoccupation in recent years. For Naipaul, the attempt to find an imaginative centre has led in his mature work to the performative assertion of the identity of the writer, and the possible reconciliation of his writing persona with his post-colonial Caribbean consciousness.

In his most recent work, the identification and acknowledgement of authoritative discourse has had an important bearing on Naipaul's engagement with the subject of the post-colonial writer. In particular, in his 1987 novel, *The Enigma of Arrival*, the negotiation of previously authoritative and internally persuasive positions and beliefs is central to the process of identity-formation presented in the text. Naipaul's novel focuses on the relationship between landscape, literature and history, and their determinations on the writer and the writing process.

*The Enigma of Arrival* continues the process with the barely fictional account of a middle-aged writer, living in voluntary exile in England, who is similarly engaged in a process of self-recovery; whilst *A Way in the World* sees the writer return to his native island of Trinidad, in order to reconcile himself to his Caribbean beginnings, and to explore the nature of his subsequent rootlessness. Each text provides a narrative centred upon the arrival of the writer, and each participates in the emergence of a new writer who has learnt from his past and been saved by his writing. Each text is then concerned with a crucial process of identity-formation. It is in 'Discourse in the Novel' that Bakhtin most explicitly lays the grounds for a discussion of the role of language in the formation of identity, and where he suggests that the novel as a genre may be the best form for revealing the intricacies of inner psychological development. For Bakhtin the word in verbal discourse is a two-sided act. It simultaneously belongs to the self and the other. This means that at the moment of enunciation each individual speaker is always necessarily involved in the process of appropriating and assimilating other words to their own individual consciousness, a process of answering others' words and authoring one's own words. The social world of verbal discourse is then, a multi-voiced and multi-linguaged world, and in it (centripetal) forces of cultural and linguistic centralisation are constantly challenged and held in check by opposing (centrifugal) forces of difference and diversity. In the process of verbal interaction these linguistic tendencies inevitably enter into contact and conflict with one another; and, for Bakhtin, it is this type of linguistic performance that typifies the activity of the novel.

Naipaul's novel may even be said to possess an allegorical dimension, primarily concerned with the decline of Empire and the renegotiation of the terms under which the contemporary world may be considered 'post-colonial'.

The writer's colonial education provides knowledge of his new setting, but it is a knowledge of a certain kind- a knowledge that is supported by the educational tools of empire and, as a consequence, a knowledge that places the writer within a 'continuing imperial apparatus'. The idea of England which provides access to the meanings of the surrounding landscape also depends on an untouchable quality that is revealed in the following comments: 'So much of this I saw with the literary eye, or with the aid of literature. A stranger here, with the nerves of the stranger, and yet with a knowledge of the language and the history of the language and the writing, I could find a special kind of past in what I saw; with a part of my mind I could admit fantasy' (EA, p.22). The writer's language here is particularly revealing. For, echoing the earlier sentiment of 'magic' and 'mystery' placed around the landlord's estate, here the writer's knowledge of the English literary tradition sanctions entry to 'a special kind of past', a 'fantasy'. Both words or phrases possess connotations of the romance of English Literature, but more importantly they also suggest a sense of prior, distanced, acknowledged authority. The writer's appreciation of 'the history of language and writing' is not simply a formulaic history of words, novels and writers; rather, it is a history, a past that has in a very real sense determined the path of his career.

*The Enigma of Arrival* becomes a narrative in which the writer begins to negotiate his own rootlessness, and finally faces his own otherness.

The question of how the writer 'delineates the relation of his language to the canon of fiction written in English', and how he reconciles the fantasy of the English writer with the reality of his colonial background is most immediately answered in the text itself. In a phrase that perhaps underplays the importance of the event, the writer states that after five years of struggling to find a voice, struggling with 'material': 'I wrote very simply and fast of the simplest things in my memory' (EA, p.135). This refers to the writing of his first book (*Miguel Street*), and the imaginative return he begins to make to the island of his youth in this and other books. Moving between the poles of authoritative and internally persuasive discourse, writing becomes a process of salvation and restoration and an integral part of the writer's survival<sup>12</sup>. Illustrating this, at the central point of the novel the writer confesses, 'With me, everything started from writing. Writing had brought me to England, had sent me away from England; had given me a vision of romance; had nearly broken me with disappointment.

Addressing the rootlessness of the post-colonial writer, *The Enigma of Arrival* presents a post-colonial consciousness awakening to independent ideological life in a world of alien discourses, and suggests that in the face of the legacies of empire and colonialism all identities and truths are at least half fictions. In the course of the novel, this leads the writer to conclude that there is no essential and universal connection between landscape, literature and history.

**UNIT 5: A SYNOPSIS ON HISTORICAL EMERGENCE AND AESTHETIC OF IDENTITY IN DEREK WALCOTT'S ANOTHER LIFE AND WILSON HARRIS'S THE GUYANA QUARTET**

Walcott's critical discussions begin to converge with his creative intentions in the writing of *Another Life*, his book-length poem which was first published in 1973. The clearest aspect of this convergence is evident from the way in which Walcott continues to respond in *Another Life* to the pervading sense of negation and nothingness in the Caribbean, represented by Naipaul's *The Middle Passage*. One of the first instances of this occurs in the final chapter of Book One where, in a moment of epiphany, the poet falls to his knees and weeps 'for nothing and for everything / ... for the earth of the hill under [his] knees, / for the grass, the pebbles...' and so on (AL, p.185). Framed in quasi-religious terms, this passage describes the moment of the poet's conversion to a life of art. It also indicates a desire to shift a negative (nothing) perception of the island's history to a positive (everything) sense of acceptance and opportunity, as he seeks to find and fulfil his vocation by naming the island. At the close of the poem the poet finds himself in meditative mood again. Here he contemplates the absence of history in the Caribbean from the vantage-point of Rampanalgas, a remote fishing village on the north-east coast of Trinidad. Watching his children play with conch-shells 'in the brown creek that is Rampanalgas River', the poet observes that, 'that child who puts the shell's howl to his ear, / hears nothing, hears everything / that the historian cannot hear' (AL, p.285).

Addressing those historians who chase after facts and 'gild cruelty' the poet hopes 'they will absolve us, perhaps, if we begin again, / from what we have always known, nothing' (AL, p.286). And later, he admits, 'I wanted to grow white-haired / as the wave, with a wrinkled // brown rock's face, salted, / seamed, an old poet, / facing the wind // and nothing, which is, / the loud world in his mind' (AL, p.290). As in Walcott's essays of the early-1970's then, the idea of nothing has a significant part to play in the meaning of *Another Life*. On one level it operates as a performative that signifies the polemic position adopted by the poet to a linear sense of historical determination in the poem. On another level, it also signals a starting-point: the cultural base from which Walcott must proceed in his writing of Caribbean history as myth. John Figueroa certainly supports this assertion when he notes that in *Another Life* 'nothing is no longer only the experience of the negative, the depriving, the bitter', rather, 'It is at the very least, the emptying that is the necessary condition of creativity, of the fresh start'<sup>4</sup>; whilst, Edward Baugh more specifically remarks in his monograph on Walcott's poem that, 'Rampanalgas is the nothing which is everything, the nothing out of which something can be made'<sup>5</sup>. What Baugh means

by this is that, within the world of the poem, Rampanalgas acts as both a reference point for the so-called absence of history, and an opportunity for a new historical beginning, precisely because of the blank canvas it offers. For Baugh, the former is shown in the opening description of the Rampanalgas landscape, which allows for neither history nor meaning ('Miasma, acedia, the enervations of damp... ', AL, p.283); whilst the latter is intimated in Walcott's celebration of the 'holiness' of Rampanalgas and its inhabitants, who have both survived centuries of physical destruction ('holy is Rampanalgas and its high-circling hawks, / holy are the rusted, tortured, rust-caked, blind almond trees, / your great-grandfather's, and your father's torturing limbs', AL, p.289). With this final gesture of praise, Baugh suggests, Walcott offers a record of presence and endurance in *Another Life* which, occurring as it does at the climax of the poem, iterates and affirms the potential for cultural and historical renewal where others have seen only 'nothing'.

Described by Walcott as 'a biography of ... a West Indian intelligence'<sup>6</sup>, *Another Life* is a poem of the Caribbean mind, another account of the emergence of the Caribbean artist, that is both personal and political, individual and communal, and fundamentally autobiographical and historical. Written as Walcott approached the age of forty, the poem looks back to the 'other life' of the poet's youth, and presents an account of love, tragedy, celebration and death against the backdrop of his entry into the world of poetry (he had previously thought of becoming an artist) and his impending departure from his native island of St Lucia. Perhaps best seen as an ensemble piece, in *Another Life* Walcott pays homage to three key figures in his early life- Harry Simmons, a mentor and art tutor; Dunstan St Omer, a friend and fellow artist (known in the poem as Gregorias), and Andreuille Alcee, his first love (often referred to as Anna). Divided into four parts (mostly covering the period 1947-50, but also moving up to the present, i.e. 1973), the poem consists of four books and a total of twenty-three chapters, in which Walcott employs a variety of poetic registers and styles in order to present a complex, imaginative whole. In Book One, 'The Divided Child', the poem opens with the young Walcott surveying the view across the Castries harbour during a day spent painting. Thereafter the vision expands across the 'sociological contours' of the island (AL, p.148), taking in home and village, business and religion, before closing with Walcott's acceptance of his vocation and inheritance. Following this, Book Two, 'Homage to Gregorias', tells of how, along with his friend Gregorias, Walcott immersed himself in his art. This in turn occasions a consideration of the methods and role of the New World artist seeking to intervene in the writing of the life and history of the Caribbean. The second book closes with the outbreak of a fire throughout Castries, and against the backdrop of this event, Book Three, 'A Simple Flame', concentrates almost exclusively on the young poet's love affair with

Anna, who is also an emblem of his love for his island. Towards the end of the book the poet's departure from the island is fast approaching, and with it too come feelings of betrayal. However, as the poet leaves the island 'A Simple Flame' closes with a simple but compelling evocation of the names of 'Harry, Dunstan, Andreuille' (AL, p.257), providing a reminder of the debt the poet owes to each. In the final book, 'The Estranging Sea', the mature poet returns to consider the role of art and the artist in the Caribbean, in the face of the sudden death of his mentor Harry Simmons. Most significantly, this leads him to reflect once more upon the 'muse of history', and it is here that he makes clear his desire to challenge the dominant recorded history of the islands, that has created a literature of remorse and revenge. His belief in the possibility for historical recuperation in the Caribbean, through the artistic contribution of the region's painters and writers, is reflected in the dedication to Dunstan St Omer in the final lines of the poem, 'Gregorias, listen, lit, / we were the light of the world!' (AL, p.294).

The closing lines of *Another Life* provide a testament to the enduring influence of Harry Simmons, as well as a tribute to the inspiring presence of Walcott's childhood friend Gregorias. The poem is however primarily a narrative of emergence and becoming, in which Walcott's apprenticeship as a painter and a poet is intimately connected to an important process of identity formation, which in turn is connected to the awakening of a distinctly Caribbean historical sensibility. Like Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival* and Brathwaite's *Arrivants* trilogy, this allows us to read Walcott's *Another Life* as another example of ideological becoming in which the arrival of the Caribbean writer provides one of the major themes of the work.

*Another Life* begins with the poet sketching the outlines of the surrounding landscape from the verandah of St Mary's College in St Lucia, 'where the pages of the sea / are a book left open by an absent master / in the middle of another life' (AL, p.145)<sup>7</sup>. Thus, in the opening stanzas we see him making an initial claim on the Caribbean landscape in the process of realising his art. Looking out across the harbour, over the 'the British fort / above the promontory', 'the gables of the St. Antoine Hotel', 'the flag / at Government House' and 'the last shacks of the Mome', the aspirant painter stands 'mesmerized like fire without wind', waiting silently 'for the verification of detail' that will complete his impression of the Caribbean (AL, pp. 145-146). Identifying himself as 'a prodigy of the wrong age and colour' (AL, p.145), he hints at the gap between his experience of the Caribbean and the impression of the Caribbean that has thus far been recorded, and thereby establishes a close relation between art and politics in the writing of the poem. Surveying 'a landscape locked in amber', burnt with the colour of sunset, he also provides an intimation of one of the central paradoxes of

the poem, as his desire to seal and preserve the view contrasts with a desire to heighten and transform the region through his art, and thus both represents and re-enacts the conflict between history and art in Walcott's remembrance of things past. Providing a good indication of the way in which history as a concept impacts upon an individual's vision of reality, this suggests, as Nana Wilson-Tagoe argues, that there is a clear relationship between Walcott's 'developing concept of history and the direction of his poetic style' (Wilson-Tagoe, 'History and Style in *Another Life*', p.51). In addition to this, it is my contention that Walcott's developing concepts of history and style coalesce in a narrative of individual and cultural emergence in *Another Life*, and that the opening sequence also introduces the theme of historical becoming into the poem. The 'book left open by an absent master' is not only a reference to an artist's manual or collection of prints that a master might leave open for his pupil, but it also suggests an opening onto history from which the poet can begin again and start anew, in order to work towards a notion of Caribbean history based upon the idea of history as myth and a vision of man as elemental. Writing and rewriting the history of the region as he follows the relentless, unforgiving rhythm of the sea, the poet is given the opportunity to name his island by an absent master, who offers an alternative vision of the island and introduces him to the worlds of art and literature and the attendant paradoxes of each<sup>8 9</sup>. The word 'begin' occurs three times in the first two stanzas, and this emphasis upon beginnings connects artistic potential with historical potential, as the opening of the poem presents a moment of creation and possibility from which the rest of the poem must follow. Certainly, this sense of possibility is supported by Walcott's argument in 'The Muse of History', in which he speaks of 'the possibility of man and language waking to wonder' in the Caribbean (Walcott, 'The Muse of History', p.53), in as much as the poem portrays the figure of a Caribbean man gradually able to erase the past from his memory and emerge into a world of Caribbean presence with a sense of elation.

Responding to what he terms 'the muse of history', in *Another Life* Walcott addresses the debilitating nature of this sort of dominant notion of 'History', and instead suggests the need for a new historical perspective in the Caribbean. In Walcott's poem questions of 'potential', 'freedom' and 'creative initiative' are central to the main narrative of historical emergence, and it is through the individual emergence of the Caribbean artist and poet that this process of becoming is principally revealed.

### **Wilson Harris**

*Wilson Harris and the Caribbean Novel* suggest that both writers share key interests which effectively circulate around the notion of the cross-cultural. Gilkes' study is notable for its deliberate discussion of Harris

within a Caribbean context, and for its exploration of the crisis of identity at the heart of Harris' fiction.

All of Harris' novels bear the marks of his mixed ancestral heritage and argue for the recovery and recuperation of a hidden or forgotten past as the basis for establishing a cross-cultural future<sup>1</sup>. Often described as strange and difficult, Harris' novels are perhaps best seen as complex narratives of social and psychological crisis, in which the possibility for radical change is born in those moments of tension when opposing visions of reality conflict and interact with each other. For Harris, this provides the opportunity to question the fixed notion of an inherited colonial reality, to dismantle the rule of absolute thought that governs the colonial consciousness, and to return to the past to recover a more creative understanding of the way cultures inevitably and positively interact. In novel after novel Harris maps out an almost identical imaginative terrain, which suggests that each novel he has written is part of an ongoing process of cross- cultural engagement.

Harris' trilogy was also written on the boundary between two worlds; that is to say, it emerges at the moment when the Caribbean is beginning to move from a colonial to a post-colonial framework. It therefore places Harris' text firmly within the complex socio-political context of the period, and suggests too an analogy between formal and thematic freedom and the desire for greater personal and political independence for the peoples of Guyana.

In *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin describe the concept of place in post-colonial societies as 'a complex interaction of language, history and environment... characterised firstly by a sense of displacement ... and secondly, by a sense of the immense investment of culture in the construction of place' (p.391). In *The Guyana Quartet* Harris records this split sense of displacement and investment, and replaces all absolute claims to ownership of the land with a notion of living interaction between man and landscape. Before he took up writing for a career, Harris worked as a land-surveyor for the Guyanese government in the 1940's and early 1950's, and made a number of expeditions into the interior of the country<sup>10</sup>. In his novels this expeditionary impulse reveals an inherent uncertainty and ambivalence beneath fixed impressions of the land, and an increasing rejection of both temporal and spatial restrictions on the understanding of man's relationship to his surrounding environment. In his essay Bakhtin proposes that 'a literary work's artistic unity in relationship to an actual reality is defined by its chronotope' (FTC, p.243). In Harris' *Guyana Quartet* the key chronotopic considerations centre on the writing of Guyana as an active, living, symbolic space; a vast, mythic region that provides access to the ancestral history of the nation. Space

predominates over time in each novel: 'One of [Harris'] fictions most striking attributes is that it takes place in dislodged space. Gareth Griffiths argues that, 'For Harris space 'annihilates' time as it establishes itself as the primary category, the 'womb' of space from which and to which temporal structures and constructions arise and return'<sup>12</sup>, whilst John Heame comments that the importance of space in *The Guyana Quartet* shows that for Harris '[the] sacramental union of man and landscape remains the lost, or never established factor in our lives' (Heame, 'The Fugitive in the Forest', p.160).

In *The Guyana Quartet*, Harris presents an image of Caribbean man as a partial and plural being, further reflecting the image of Guyana as a plural space of radical and multiple potentialities. Beginning with a partial, fractured notion of identity Harris opens individual identities up to other consciousnesses and cultures, and thus makes real the possibility for cultural transformation and renewal. In each of the four novels there are a number of characters- such as Carroll and Oudin- with uncertain or unknown beginnings, whose ancestral ambiguity points to the problematic nature of identity. Though accepted as true, Carroll's name is revealed to have been made up by his mother in order to protect him from his past (GQ, pp.68-69); whilst neither Ram nor Mohammed knows who or what Oudin is, or indeed where he comes from (GQ, pp.141-149). Harris suggests that it is a fatal mistake to believe in a fixed notion of one's origins. Instead, it is necessary to accept a certain partiality, and to recognise that there are aspects of one's identity that one cannot completely know. Just as environment and landscape in the sequence contain aspects of other realms, so too identity and ancestral inheritance are each shown to be subject to gaps and contradictions. The acknowledgement of one's partiality is at once a cause of vulnerability and a potential source of strength. On the one hand, it reveals a void or lack at the heart of one's identity. On the other, it makes plain that it is from this space of absence or loss that any process of restoration or transformation must begin. No identity is sovereign in Harris' fictions. Rather, all of his characters interpenetrate with each other on a symbolic and psychical level, and they are bound together through a shared history. Those with mixed parentage-such as Cameron, Schomburgh, Magda and Fenwick- contain within themselves the question of racial and cultural intermixture that the whole community must address. Similarly, the crews assembled by Donne and Fenwick act as a microcosm of the national identity. Both crews contain characters of variously intermixed Indian, African, Asian, European (British, German, Dutch, Spanish and Portuguese) and Amerindian extraction. This reflects the legacy of a history of colonialism in the region, and ties the surviving fragments of the colonial period to those from a pre-colonial age. It also establishes the connections that bind the key ethnic and racial constituencies of the nation together. In relation to *The Secret*

*Ladder*, Jean Pierre Durix notes that via the motif of the crew 'Harris suggests that any solution to the history of ethnic oppression which has plagued the Caribbean for centuries cannot lie in one group ignoring the needs of others' 16. In *Palace of the Peacock*, the importance of the crew as a collective body is made clear with the suggestion that, 'The whole crew was one spiritual family living and dying together in a common grave out of which they had sprung again from the same soul and womb as it were' (GQ, p.39). This highlights the symbolic status of the group and hints at their shared origins or common ancestry. The paradoxical combination of images of death and (re)birth suggests that the crew encapsulate a memorial to the past and a vision of the future, and implies that they exist on the boundary between conscious and unconscious life. Donne's crew is both alive and dead, and exactly resembles another crew that had perished on a previous journey into the Guyanese interior (GQ, p.37). In this sense, each member of Donne's crew is a double, an embodiment of a life repeated from generation to generation. In the *Quartet* as a whole, the mirroring of characters serves to question a fixed or singular notion of identity, and instead suggests a certain duality or cyclist.

Harris' inscription of a regenerative 'cross-cultural capacity' within *The Guyana Quartet* finally underlines the importance of the chronoscope of the threshold in his writings. At the close of each novel Harris presents a vision of a community on the verge of newness, at the threshold of a moment of radical transformation, and introduces the concept of freedom into a society seemingly governed by the legacies of violence and colonial domination. This thematic refrain establishes a point in each novel when the possibility of change is at least posed, if not yet realised.

### **Conclusion**

From our critical exploration and extensiveness in this course work so far, we have come to understand that African- American & Caribbean literature involves poetry and slave narratives. The Civil Rights and Black Arts Movements played great roles in the development of African American writing. Nowadays, African American & Caribbean literature constitutes a basis in the literature of the United States.

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, slave narratives emerged as a form of protest literature. Many former slaves, including Harriet Jacobs and Frederick Douglass wrote slave narratives about their personal lives.

After the Civil War, several black writers emerged such as W.E.B Du Bois. They wrote about the conditions of the blacks in U.S.A. Later, as the white society started to pay attention to the African American

writings, black writers used genres like fiction to tackle these issues. In addition, African American writings during the twentieth century dealt with the era of slavery to understand the present.

### Summary

This course work attempts to show the students (reader) how African – American&Caribbean literature developed throughout time. In addition, it claims that African Americans deserve equal rights as the white.

The themes of African American& Caribbean literature during the twentieth century have developed through writings in different genres which have helped the expansion of literature. African American history is marked by racism and sorrow. Thus, African American writers focus on racial injustice. They were inspired by the movement for African American freedom. Indeed, African –American& Caribbean literary production reflects the struggle for freedom and a discourse of human rights.

### Tutor Marked Assignment

1. What are the common themes that dominate Caribbean works?
2. Discuss the aesthetics of identity and self in George Lamming's *In the Castle of my Skin*.
3. What is the central message in Richard Wright's *Black Boy*? Discuss
4. Explore the literary background and writings of V.S. Naipaul
5. Discuss the themes of freedom, inclusion and empowerment in the works of the following Caribbean authors:

Wilson Harris

Ralph Ellison

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